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Samsung's stunning Series 9 3D, tested on p34

WELCOME



There really is no escaping from 3D TV in this issue; not only do we have LG's first active 3D set, we also have Samsung's hyper-stylish (and expensive) Series 9, plus an affordable 3D-ready set from Sony. As a bonus we review every 3D Blu-ray title available (all four of them!), and give you a taste of 3D games for the PS3 (p46).

For a little light relief, we're running a group test of Freeview HD PVRs: you know you want one, but which is the best? (p79) There's speaker action, too, with Q Acoustics and Crystal Audio systems sounding off, and elsewhere we go in-depth on Denon's Cara combi amplifier/BD player.

With all that, plus a chance to win some lovely furniture from Peerless (p75), and our fabulous new Extras section where we round up some tasty AV accessories (p76), you should have enough to get you through to the start of the football season!

Editor

Chris Jenkins

TEAM HCC

Steve May: *HCC*'s Editor-in-Chief has a stunning 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek: News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over 11 years ago



Mark Craven: *HCC*'s newly-appointed Deputy Editor cut his teeth on the Sub's bench



Chris Jenkins: Our ISF-calibrated Editor used to run Future's Tech Laboratories



John Rook: Art Editor John first worked on *HCC* back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



Jill Lubetkin: *HCC*'s Prod Ed is new to the mag, but a stalwart figure of the AV department



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Philips HDT 8520

Digitalstream DHR8205U

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Equipment reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice* is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase

CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business



Adam Rayner: The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson: Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal *ERT*

John Archer: The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early *HCC* staffer



Jim Hill: Apple fanatic Hill is the former editor of *T3 Home* and a *What Hi-Fi* escapee



Martin Pipe: Technology specialist Martin co-developed *HCC*'s Tech Lab operation

Adrian Justins: Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

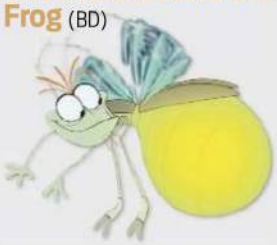
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3D buttoned up

Onkyo TX-NR5008 →www.onkyo.co.uk

Retailing for around £2,400, the THX Ultra2 Plus-certified TX-NR5008 is fully 3D-capable, courtesy of eight HDMI v1.4a inputs and packs plenty of high-end features: HQV-Reon VX processing, Audyssey DSX and Dolby Digital Pro-Logic IIz height/width processing, gold-plated audio terminals, three-zone multiroom and a backlit customisable remote are just some of the goodies on offer. The AVR will replace Onkyo's *Home Cinema Choice* Award-nominated TX-NR5007 in the brand's receiver range, and will hit the UK this August.



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High octane Octave

Morel Octave Signature → www.morelhifi.com



Israeli loudspeaker specialist, Morel, has crafted these innovative Octave Signature speakers, which comprise a bookshelf speaker and modular subwoofer, transforming the unit into a true three-way floorstander. Add a second pair of Signature Bookshelf speakers and the Signature Centre, to build a full 5.1 home cinema audio system for about €6,000 – and that price includes Morel's external Signature amps to drive the passive subwoofers.

Partner with...

Denon AVR-2311
3D-compatible AV receiver



Due to arrive in the UK in August, Denon's 7x 135W receiver supports HDMI v1.4a with Audio Return Channel and features: 3D pass-through tech; dual subwoofers preout; Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing for enhanced vertical and horizontal spatial audio; an improved 'easy-to-view' GUI, and direct play and Zone 2 playback for iPods/iPhones. No price yet. www.denon.co.uk

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Fast loading



Arcam's long-awaited debut Blu-ray player finally broke cover at June's CEDIA Home Technology Show and will go on sale in late August. The FMJ BDP100 (a cosmetic match for the FMJ AVR600 receiver) will retail for around £1,000, promises 'very fast load times', and it has been confirmed that it uses the same DACs and components as the brand's dedicated, high-end CD player. This augurs well for its audio performance. The company says a 3D upgrade will follow next year.
www.arcam.co.uk.

3D friends



Sony has launched a range of home cinema systems, which all boast 3D pass-through on the three HDMI inputs/one output, as well as 1000W of S-Master digital amplification hidden away in the subwoofer. The HT-AS5 (£400) offers four identical, ultra-compact bookshelf speakers, while the HT-AF5 (£TBC) replaces the front left/right pair with tallboy floorstanders, for use in larger rooms. Meanwhile the BDV-470SS pairs the HT-AS5 system (£TBC) with Sony's BDP-S470 3D Blu-ray player.
www.sony.co.uk

Playback savvy



TechniSat Digital has embraced Freeview HD with its £150 HDFV. This receiver has the advantage of multimedia playback from USB storage devices, networked PCs and NAS devices using a fixed connection, or wirelessly with the optional TechniSat WLAN Adaptor. The HDFV is also described as being 'DVRready', meaning users can record and timeshift programmes using an external HDD or memory stick via the device's USB port. Other features include 1080p upscaling, an 8-day EPG, and a three-year guarantee.
www.technisat.co.uk

Marantz gears up for 2010

Latest ranges embrace 3D and reflect changing use of audio

Despite its popularity with audiophiles, and the fact that it has produced some seriously good AV receivers over the years, Marantz has never managed to seriously compete with the likes of Onkyo and Sony in this sector.

However, following an exclusive briefing with the company in Portugal, *HCC* is convinced that the manufacturer is gearing up to unleash exactly the kind of extensive range needed to take on these market leaders.

Building on the success of 2009's slimline NR1501 (now re-priced at £350), this year will see the release of an HDMI v1.4 3D-ready, thin-profile offering, the NR1601 (£500) featuring Dolby Pro-Logic IIz and Audyssey processing plus HDMI passthrough. 'We've effectively created a new category with these,' claimed the company's legendary audio designer, Ken Ishiwata. The NR1601 will be joined by a range of regular AVRs with all sorts of niceties, including a digital iPod interface; of these, the SR6005, SR7005 and AV7005 will also get a spiffy new GUI.

The company isn't forgetting the premium end of the market either, with a series of high-end AVRs that combine serious styling with amazing build-quality. Best of these is the 7x125W SR7005 (£1,400), which combines Dolby Pro-Logic IIz with Audyssey DSX width/height processing and



Marantz's Ken Ishiwata says a new era is beginning for the brand

network audio streaming. Intriguingly, it also has a turntable phono input to 'bridge the gap between hi-fi and AVRs'. For the Pre/Power market, the company also has the AV7005 pre-amp (£1,700) with six HDMI v1.4 inputs/2 outputs and MM7055 5x140W power amp (£1,100).

'This is the start of a new era for Marantz. Of, course, we will respect our hi-fi heritage, but we need to reflect how people are using their content. Last year we created a new category for slim receivers, but we need to adapt, introduce even more with new products and directions,' revealed Ishiwata before introducing *HCC* to, arguably, the company's most ambitious new product, the £700 NA704 Network Audio Player. DLNA-certified, the NA704 offers high-quality DACs, extensive digital inputs, DAB and internet radio. It also has USB and can be controlled via iPhone or iPod Touch. The use of USB in a premium hi-fi environment brings its own issues, though. Ishiwata warned: 'You will be shocked at just how bad different types of USB cable can sound.'

Marantz is also prepping its first Universal 3D-ready Blu-ray players, the UD5005 (£450) and the UD7005 (£800).



Heavy metal:: Marantz's forthcoming SR7005 AVR

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Trondheim Solistene (Blu-ray)



Nordic audiophile label 2L shows how Blu-ray can take hi-fi to new heights. This stunning set is recorded in DTS HD MA 5.1 24/192kHz, and bundled with an SACD for fuddy-duddies. *SM*

2 The Protectors: Series 1 (R2 DVD)



Gerry Anderson's only contemporary live-action series was, ironically, his longest runner; Robert Vaughn's charisma keeps the 1972 private detective thriller motoring nicely. *CJ*

3 Up in the Air (R2 DVD)



George Clooney clocks up maximum airmiles while flying across the US as a professional axeman. Makes corporate life bleakly funny. *JL*

4 UFC Undisputed 2010 (PS3)



Kapow! Smack! Crunch! With this well-made fighting game, beating up friends and family has never been so fun. *MC*

5 Evil Toons (R1 DVD)



A bevy of busty babes are tormented by a cartoon demon in this bizarre 1992 flick. *AvB*

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Demo'd!

The AV highlights of... *Book of Eli* on Blu-ray

Come and get it



15.03: This inventive fight scene that plays out entirely in silhouette will test your black levels, as Eli takes on a violent gang beneath an old overpass.

Spoilin' for a fight



51.57: A gunshot blasting from front right to rear left highlights the imaginative nature of the audio design and its immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundscape.

This house is on fire



78.26: The spectacular siege looks the business (thanks to the stunningly detailed AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode), while the audio is packed with spatial effects as bullets rip the house to shreds..

Highway to Hell



87.59: This scene exemplifies the precision and clarity of the audio: the bounce of the grenade down the tarmac has acoustic weight and resonance, followed by a bass-infused explosion.



Xpanding our horizons

3D specs specialist brings cinematic know-how to the living room

The 3D home cinema revolution is gaining momentum with most of the major AV manufacturers now having 3DTVs and Blu-ray players in the shops. But there is still the issue of the lack of compatibility between the 3D glasses and TVs from the various brands. Thankfully, a solution is at hand courtesy of US 3D specialist XpanD and its X103 active shutter glasses.

The company has a long track record in theatrical 3D presentations, and now has more than 3,000 screens worldwide, including a large presence in North America and continental Europe, plus almost the entire Japanese market. CEO Maria Costeira believes it's their experience that places XpanD ahead of the game, now that it is bring its active shutter glasses to the home market.

'We've already had a strong learning curve about what 3D glasses should face in day to day life, what with kids, sanitation, sizing, weight and all those things,' Costeira told *HCC* during an exclusive briefing about the X103 glasses. 'What we suffered five years ago, a lot of these consumer electronics companies are only just going to start suffering now.'

Designed to work with 3D-ready LCD laptop and desktop monitors, DLP, LCD and plasma screens, XpanD believes that its active shutter glasses are the consumer tech holy grail of truly universal 3D glasses. 'Once you have a 3D TV channel, the glasses receive a signal. For the next three to five seconds they scan it, and when they find which wave that TV is they sync in,' Costeira explains.

Boasting compatibility with 'virtually anything capable of playing 3D-encoded content at 120fps,' the X103 3D specs certainly



Maria Costeira, CEO of XpanD, says Panasonic's 3D glasses are badly designed

sound like an enticing proposition, but can they possibly live up to the claims? 'Basically, I say 99 per cent, because I never say anything is 100 per cent sure in life,' she says about the cross-compatibility of the glasses.

As for the 3D glasses currently shipping with TVs, Costeria thinks their quality is compromised by a desire to make them cheaply. 'The true value of the lens – when it opens and closes, the refresh rate, colour, contrast – makes the difference. We've had years of improving it and they just cannot compare'.

And that's not the only problem. 'The giants are always like "Oh, we can develop anything". Just look at Panasonic's glasses, they thought they could solve sizing problems with just one pair. Then to solve the size issues about the difference between Caucasian and Asiatic heads, they opened their glasses at the side. But the basic rule of 3D is that you need darkness, you should never open your glasses and allow light to enter. So they gave up on the basic quality of 3D to solve a mechanical problem.'



Universal goggles: The active shutter X103 glasses are claimed to work with 99% of 3D displays

Great Scott!



On October 25, Universal Pictures will be bringing the *Back to the Future Trilogy* to Blu-ray in the UK, with all-new digitally restored transfers (hopefully framed correctly, unlike the original DVD release) and with new DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks. In addition to all of the extras from the previous DVD sets, this 25th Anniversary Blu-ray boxset also crams in a host of exclusive bonus goodies including: U-Control functions; a six-part retrospective documentary; storyboards for the original ending to the first film and a look at the science of time-travelling.
www.universalpictures.com

Glee: Season 1



The complete first season of the worldwide TV phenomenon *Glee* will be singing and dancing its way onto DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on September 13. Both releases of this award-winning show will come packed with bonus feature,s including extended episodes, sing-along karaoke numbers, a dance tutorial, a behind-the-scenes look at *The Power of Madonna* episode, video diaries, promo featurettes and audition footage, while the Blu-ray releases adds the exclusive *Behind the Pilot: A Visual Commentary with the Cast and Crew*.
www.fox.co.uk

Video nasties



Athough the whole Handycam-horror subgenre feels like it's been done to death already, we've got to admit that we're very excited about catching the sequel to the Spanish cult hit *[Rec]* when it comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on September 20. Bigger, bloodier and reportedly even better than the original, *[Rec]2* comes to DVD accompanied by extended and deleted scenes, while the Blu-ray version adds behind-the-scenes footage and a Making of... featurette. A Special Edition of the original *[Rec]* is also being released on Blu-ray on the same day.
http://e1entertainment.com

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Marvel mix

Kick-Ass → Universal Pictures
R2 DVD & All-region BD



Matthew Vaughn's ultra-violent, tabloid-baiting look at what would happen if superheroes existed in the real world makes its debut on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on September 6, courtesy of Universal Pictures. Extra features on both take the form of a director's commentary, 20min featurette called the *Comic Book Origin of Kick-Ass*, a four-part 114min *Making of* documentary and a gallery of character designs, production art and storyboards. The Blu-ray release also ups the ante with the promise of an ass-kicking DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 soundtrack!

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Pick'n'Mix



Filmmaker Eric Forsberg chooses his five favourite DVDs...

1 The Godfather I & II
This beautiful and violent film is the world's most perfect five hours of movie making.

2 Alien
After this film, space travel was run by capitalists, smelled sweaty and was entirely unpredictable. The perfect film in its genre.

3 Jacob's Ladder
An amazing script given the perfect mind-altering execution. A horror like no other before it.

4 The Good, The Bad and The Ugly
Sergio Leone gives us the perfect anti-hero in this ground-breaking western, scored by Morricone.

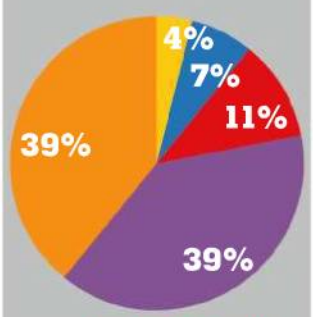
5 Braveheart
The best historic hero movie ever!

Eric Forsberg started early in the film business, working as an assistant editor for his father, independent filmmaker Rolf Forsberg. He went on to write scripts for the likes of *Snakes on a Train* and *War of the Worlds 2: The Next Wave*, and has directed several features – including *Mega Piranha*, released on DVD on August 9, courtesy of Metrodome Distribution.

We asked...

Do you ever pay to watch online movie/TV content?

■ Yes, all the time ■ Sometimes, but I also download illegally ■ Never, I always download material illegally ■ Never, I only watch legitimate free online material ■ I've never watched online movie/TV content!



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Pay per month kicks off

BT Vision introduces Sky sports coverage to tempt football viewers

While the England squad's performance at the World Cup left a lot to be desired, BT is still pinning its hopes on 'the beautiful game' to tempt viewers onto its BT Vision platform, following the arrival of Sky Sports 1 and 2.

BT Vision users can now add Sky Sports to their service package for as little as £6.99. However, the company is keen to point out that the service offers considerable advantages over the packages Sky itself provides.

BT Vision's commercial director, Andy Baker, told *HCC*, 'The Pay TV market in the UK has been structurally flawed, which ultimately has hampered innovation. This is truly a groundbreaking announcement that changes the game of Pay TV in the UK... The big difference is that you can pay on a per month basis. If you don't want Sky Sports all year round, you don't have to have it. We're offering freedom for fans.'

He went on to say: 'We currently have 467,000 subscribers, but not having Sky Sports has hampered our ability to drive take-up. Viewers have long told us that they'd love to take BT Vision, but the lack of live games has put them off. That's all going to change now.'

With Baker's so-called 'major turning point for the service', BT hopes to tempt football fans with its 'total sports package'. Currently, if you take a combination of broadband plus calls for 24 months, you can get Sky Sports 1, ESPN and on-demand sport from BT Vision for £6.99. £11.99 will also get you Sky Sports 2.



BT Vision's Andy Baker says his company's pricing package is 'unique'

'This works out £205 cheaper than Sky's current equivalent deal,' trills Baker, 'and £281 cheaper than Virgin Media over a year. For that section of the UK population that doesn't want to pay huge subscriptions for football, this is unique'.

However, while the addition of the Sky Sports channels are undoubtedly a major boost for the service, a major problem still exists in the fact that the BT Vision platform currently lags behind its rivals is in the area of hi-def. Baker concedes this, but states that 'as bandwidth issues improve, we'll be able to consider HD'. He also revealed that a third-generation box, with a Freeview HD tuner, is on the way. 'Yes, there will be a Freeview HD version of BT Vision. When we launched our second-generation box late last year, Freeview HD tuners were just not available. Freeview HD PVRs are only just coming to market now. We are looking to introduce an HD version later this year.'



BT's solution: Sports fans can get Sky's channels on a monthly basis

LG's night watch



The eye-catching HB45E is LG's latest Blu-ray home cinema system. Despite only offering a 2.1-channel 400W audio package, LG UK's head of marketing, Stephen Gater, claims the HB45E 'is all about versatility in sound, configuration and content', thanks to DLNA functionality and access to online content such as YouTube and Picasa through LG's Netcast service. The company is also flagging up the £500 system's audio capabilities, including such audio settings as the Night Mode, which reduces bass to suit neighbours.
www.lge.com

Add 3D magic



Yamaha is offering a firmware upgrade to ensure that users of several models from its range of Digital Sound Projector home cinema soundbars can get the best from them when partnered with the latest 3D Blu-ray tech and TVs. The upgrade for the YSP-4100 and YSP-5100 (pictured) adds HDMI v1.4 3D pass through and Audio Return Channel capability, while an upgrade for the YHT-S400 and YHT-S1400 sound systems adds 3D support. The firmware is available to download now by logging on to http://uk.yamaha.com

Order yours now



Home cinema fans with big rooms and even bigger wallets take note: Panasonic's 103in 3D plasma, the TH103VX200, will be available to buy in the first quarter of 2011 for around £70,000. *HCC* heard the news from the megascreen's distributor AWE at the recent CEDIA Home Technology Event at London's ExCel, where we also had an exclusive demo of the screen in action. AWE managing director Stuart Tickle also said sales of the standard £55,000 2D 103in plasma are still a solid one per month.
www.panasonic.co.uk

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This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

News x10



1 Imerge goes under

Award-winning UK media server innovator Imerge has closed down. The decision was made by the parent company, Nortek, Inc. as part of a 'larger restructuring of its Home Technology Group of companies'.

2 Japan still not sold on 3D

According to a new survey, it appears that Japanese consumers still aren't convinced by 3D, with 70 per cent of 9,000 respondents blaming having to wear glasses for their decision not to buy a 3DTV. Fifty seven per cent also claimed that the cost of the tech was too high, while another 40 per cent blamed the lack of content.

3 Tesco takes on iTunes

Tesco is planning to launch a Digital Locker online file service that could transform the home entertainment landscape in the UK, and challenge the supremacy of iTunes in the UK. Speaking at an entertainment summit in London, a representative for the company revealed that the service would be integrated with Tesco's Clubcard database and will mirror Disney's planned Keychest initiative in the US, enabling consumers to access content they've purchased (be it music, movies or TV shows) on any device at any time.

4 Smaller 3DTVs on the way

Panasonic has expanded the number of 3D TV screen sizes in its range, with 42- and 46in 3D models recently hitting the Japanese market, joining the 50- and 65in TVs already available. While no official announcement has been made, it seems certain that these screens sizes will hit the UK later this year, probably after an introduction at September's IFA technology show.

5 Pirate Party seeks immunity

Those naughty chaps at Swedish-based Pirate Bay have come up with a plan to host their BitTorrent search engine inside the Swedish parliament, in order to make use of a law that would give the site immunity from prosecution. The only catch is that the party doesn't actually have any parliamentary seats yet – although that could all change in the next elections, taking place this September.

6 Lucas' meddling continues

Skywalker Sound engineers Matt Wood and David Acord have revealed that they've been remixing the audio for the original *Star Wars Trilogy* yet again. But what they wouldn't reveal is whether the new audio is for the Blu-ray boxset (expected next year) or the long-rumoured 3D re-release of the films.

7 Show of hands

Panasonic has announced the 'D-Imager', a high-performance 3D motion sensor that it says will usher in a new era of interactive gesture-control. To showcase the tech the company has created a Life Wall showing how users could make gesture control work for all manner of activities, from playing a Blu-ray to conducting a video call.

8 Has 3D cinema peaked?

While *Toy Story 3* has been breaking all kinds of records on its US cinema release, the film is also being used by some commentators as proof that the novelty of 3D movies has finally worn off. According to BTIG Research only 60 per cent of the movie's revenue came from 3D screenings, as opposed to 61 for *Shrek Forever After* and 70 per cent for *Alice in Wonderland*, indicating a slow but steady decline over the first half of the year.

9 Another Brick in the Wall

Sharp has unveiled a spectacular LED TV wall display solution made from multiples of the brand's PN-V601 60in professional LED-backlit monitor, which can be configured for any size requirements. At a press conference in Japan, the company built a 15ft high by 22ft wide display from 30 of the 6.5mm thin Pro LED panels.

10 3D movies on the go

The recent E3 US gaming expo saw Nintendo unveil the next evolution of its handheld gaming systems, the 3DS. And as expected, the device does use autostereoscopic technology to creating a 3D gaming experience without the need for special glasses. The brand's surprise revelation was that, in addition to games, it will also be offering 3D movie material on cartridge for the device with content from the likes of Disney and Warner.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Going to Jackson



Following the problems with MGM and the departure of director Guillermo Del Toro, it is now starting to look as if Peter Jackson may, once again take the helm of the two-part adaptation of *The Hobbit*.

Sony finds its Spider(-Man)

Following what the studio is describing as a 'comprehensive worldwide casting search', 27 year-old Andrew Garfield has been cast as Peter Parker in the upcoming *Spider-Man* reboot. The actor previously appeared in the Dr Who two-parter *Daleks in Manhattan/Evolution of the Daleks*.

Miss versus miss

Eighties teen pop stars, Debbie Gibson (*Mega Shark...*) and Tiffany *(Mega Piranha)* are preparing to resume their decades-old, onscreen rivalry in the hilariously entitled *Mega Python vs Gatoroid*.

Mutant mayhem



Casting continues apace for Matthew Vaughn's *X-Men: First Class*, which will be hitting cinemas next Summer. Joining the previously announced James McAvoy (Professor Charles Xavier) and Michael Fassbender (*Magneto*) in the comic book blockbuster are Caleb Landry as Banshee and *She's Out of My League*'s Alice Eve as the bitchy psychic, Emma Frost.

Monkey magic

Twentieth Century Fox has revealed that Andy Serkis has been hired to provide the mo-capped performance for the computer-rendered main ape Caesar in the forthcoming *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* reboot *Rise of the Apes*.

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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson finds affordable ways to keep your AV equipment performing well, without having to add to government coffers

Our delightful new coalition government has ushered in an age of austerity, and it pleases me not. Higher VAT and taxes will mean fewer pounds in my pocket and less to spend on home cinema stuff. The chips are down, the going is tough, and I am looking for new and exciting ways of enhancing my home cinema pleasure on a tight budget. So I have turned to Voodoo, and I don't mean just sticking pins in doll effigies of all those greedy bankers that put us in this mess in the first place. Not since the heady days of tweaking my turntable in the 1980's has the lure of that old black magic had such an audiophile appeal.

Home-spun gris gris

Back in the day I could be found aligning my system with magnetic north, raising my speaker cables off the ground on cut-in-half coke bottles and painting the edges of my CDs with green ink in the pursuit of a low-cost upgrade. The sort of stuff that makes Feng Shui look like a sub-division of Newtonian physics. While there is no such thing as a free lunch, there are several cost effective things you can do to maximise your AV enjoyment, and doing them dressed in a black cloak with chicken feathers helps. But that might be just me.

Power corrupts. Or, to be more accurate, is corrupt. Your mains supply is probably the dirtiest, least consistent and most distorted signal in your entire AV system. Speaking from bitter experience of a poor quality power supply, a 15 per cent variance in mains voltage in just a few hours is not uncommon, and THD on the 50Hz signal can reach 10 per cent at the worst times of the day. Add to this local issues caused by fridges, low energy lighting, the mains-RF-broadband system and nasty, half-wave rectifiers found in almost every flatscreen TV and you have a problem. This is tantamount to trying to get the best from a Supercar while running it on agricultural diesel.

Buying PS Audio's Power Plant Premier mains regenerators was one of the best system upgrades I ever made, but cheap they are not. If there is a little money in the pot look at some of the lower cost conditioners, a current favourite of mine being the Isol-8 PowerLine Axis, PS Audio's Quintet and Isotek's Mira. Sadly the really cheap stuff below these just doesn't work and often has a current limiting effect that's not good for amps.

If the Chancellor has already raided your piggy bank, then it's time for some DIY mains tweakery. For starters, if you have a HomePlug or similar mains-based broadband distribution system, disconnect it and sell same on eBay at your earliest convenience. Nothing I have ever tried in my home has had such a catastrophically negative effect on the performance of both the audio system and the projector. Seriously, I had my projector returned to be checked, before I realised what the cause of the picture noise issue was.

While disconnecting fridges, particularly those hosting beer, is not advisable, put them and your system on separate circuits from the consumer unit, if possible. Make sure no mains cables are running parallel to speaker cables or interconnects, to eliminate induction interference, and **take some time ensuring all your sockets and plugs are spotlessly clean**. The same goes for speaker and interconnect cable, although I admit cleaning each pin on an HDMI socket could prove a challenge. I can't be sure whether cleaning all these contacts makes a real difference, but it works for me.

Of course, watching more movies from services such as LOVEFiLM, which offers a cornucopia of HD movie entertainment for a few quid a month, is a defiantly cost effective way to get the most out of your system

Do you have any low-cost electrical tweaks? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com



Richard Stevenson has a black belt in Voodoo and an 'O' level in house keeping, so please exercise caution when trying his suggestions

ILLUSTRATION: BY RENÊ ANDREW

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DVD ADDICT

This month, **The Beek** thinks he should see a doctor. But not a GP. He wants classic *Doctor Who* episodes delivered straight to the vein

My name is Anton van Beek... and I'm an addict. Okay, given the title of this column, that statement isn't going to shock anybody. But, while I've never been reticent to discuss my five years of DVD dependency (and more recently my Blu-ray bingeing), the subject of this confession is a little more delicate. You see, I am a Whovian, thanks to Doctor bloody Who.

For years now, I've looked down on all of those Trekkers, Gaters and *Star Wars* fanatics, chuckling to myself at their vast collections of unopened action figures and sneering at their ill-fitting replica costumes. But now I must count myself as being no different .

Unlike all of the cool kids out there, I'm not talking about the 'new' *Doctor Who,* either. Oh sure, I love the stuff that Russell T Davis (and now Stephen Moffat) have been doing with the show since 2005, but who doesn't? After all, New Who is now the official face of popular family drama. It mixes big ideas, action and laughs together in a way that everybody can enjoy.

No, I'm talking about the classic *Doctor Who* that ran pretty consistently between 1963 and 1989 (barring that 18-month production hiatus during Colin Baker's reign and ignoring the ill-fated 1996 TV movie starring Paul McGann). The one primarily remembered by my own circle of friends as the show with the 'crappy-looking aliens, wobbly sets and even wobblier performances'.

So, why now? What caused me to amass a collection of some 76 classic *Doctor Who* stories on DVD (plus the *Lost in Time* pack collecting the surviving fragments from several of the stories that have been lost over the decades, as well as the four New Who DVD boxsets and The Complete Specials Blu-ray) in the space of less than a year? Why do I now have a shelving rack dedicated solely to housing the adventures of TV's most famous time traveller on DVD? Well, it's all down to those ridiculously talented folks who make up the *Doctor Who* Restoration Team.

Over the past decade, I've reviewed a selection of classic *Doctor Who* DVDs for both the late-lamented *Total DVD* and for *HCC*. And over the years, my appreciation of the team's painstaking restoration work on the episodes has continued to grow, not to mention their overseeing the production of additional content for the DVDs. But it was the release, last summer, of the 10-episode 1969 Patrick Troughton serial, *The War Games,* that really made me take notice.

Not only did this superb three-disc set introduce me to the actor's take on the Doctor (I grew up in the days of Tom Baker) and feature the kind of immaculate restoration that I'd come to expect, but it also boasted a fascinating collection of extra features covering everything from the making of the serial to the artistic constraints of shooting black and white TV, and even a look at the Doctor's adventures in print (both book and comics). I sat and watched them all, utterly engrossed by the lot. And that's when it dawned on me. This was no ordinary collection of bonus features. Instead, across the entire range of DVDs the Restoration Team was assembling the most comprehensive look at the production of a TV series ever attempted, covering everything from how the each serial was made to every facet of the franchise's cultural impact and interactions with fandom. Taken together it becomes a truly encyclopaedic account of the history of the legendary TV series, on a scale never attempted by any other release.

And just like that, my disc-dependent brain has kicked in. I realise that I must have them all

What TV shows or films can you not live without? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com



Anton van Beek has built a Tardis in his hallway, but it's blocking his front door and he can't get to the office. This piece was sent by email

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TIME MACHINES

Martin Pipe travels back to the start of the hi-def era when blue laser discs looked potentially useful and HD DVD was a twinkle in Toshiba's eye

DVD will be remembered as one of the major consumer electronics success stories. Its successor, HD DVD, definitely won't. So what went wrong?

It was back in 2002 that the steering committee of the DVD Forum announced that it would be pushing DVD's hi-def upgrade – then known as the Advanced Optical Disc – as a replacement for the ageing format. AOD, re-christened HD DVD the following year, physically differed from the original DVD insofar as the player used a blue laser diode in its optical pickup assembly. The advantage of these is their shorter wavelength, so the data-carrying pits and lands of the disc can be much smaller than they are with DVD or CD. As a result, more information can be crammed onto a 5in disc: 15GB for a one-sided, single-layer HD DVD, as opposed to the 4.7GB capacity of DVD. Capacities of this magnitude were considered essential for the extra demands of HD video.

The biggest backers of HD DVD were hardware manufacturer Toshiba and studio Warner Bros. The former was a founding member of the HD DVD Promotion Group, which eventually boasted over 130 members. Among them was Microsoft, which saw the format as a natural partner for its hi-def games console, the Xbox 360. In addition, the PC giant's HDi platform was set to power HD DVD's advanced array of interactive menus, bookmarks, special content, games and multi-picture functions. A key advantage of the format was that **DVD production plants could be readily adapted to knock out HD DVDs for comparatively little cost.**

In 2002, HD DVD's eventual nemesis, Blu-ray, was announced. As with the CD format, much of its initial development was conducted by Sony and Philips. The BD disc offered a higher capacity than HD DVD, even before multi-layer recording was factored in. A full 25GB was available on a single-layer disc and 50GB on a dual-layer one.



Martin Pipe still uses his Toshiba HD DVD player to upscale his DVDs. Other HCC team members are using them as draught excluders

It's war!

Both Blu-ray and HD DVD could offer 1080p24 video (MPEG-2, VC1 or AVC), and promised hi-def or uncompressed multichannel audio and user interaction that was superior to DVD. In 2005 steps were taken to try and prevent another 'Betamax-versus-VHS'-style format war. But negotiations failed to achieve a unified standard across both platforms.

And so, in 2006, both Blu-ray and HD DVD were introduced, the latter beating the former to the market by a mere three months. In the UK, you could choose between Toshiba's HD-E1 or HD-XE1 HD DVD spinners or Samsung's BDP-1000 Blu-ray deck. Then came Sony's PS3, still the world's best-selling Blu-ray player, and more dedicated machines from the likes of Sony and Panasonic. For HD DVD, though, it was Toshiba or nothing, unless you wanted Microsoft's HD DVD drive for the Xbox 360 or LG's unique dual-format player, the BH100.

For home cinema fans HD DVD seemed the better proposition. It came to market with a finalised specification (no Profile 1.0/1.1/2.0 issues here), the discs were not region-coded, and the interactive features – such as the excellent In-Movie Experience on the release of *300* – were far in advance of what BD was offering at the same time.

But then it all went wrong. In February 2008, citing 'consumer indifference', Warner Bros. announced it was dropping its support for the format. Shortly afterwards, Toshiba told us that it would no longer be developing, manufacturing or marketing HD DVD players. Suddenly HD DVD was dead – so much so that last year (after first introducing a DVD deck with state-of-the-art upscaling technology) Toshiba finally capitulated and produce its debut Blu-ray player

Did you see the writing on the wall for HD DVD? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

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Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **Our calendar** means you don't miss out



Marmaduke: Canine capers come to the cinema, August 18

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				**30** **Technicolor cartoon** Walt Disney made history on this day in 1932 with the release of the Silly Symphonies cartoon *Flowers and Trees* – the first commercially released film to be produced in the full-colour three-strip Technicolor process	**31** **Pulp fiction** Legendary pulp icon, *The Shadow*, made his debut on this day in 1930 as the mysterious narrator on the *Detective Story Hour* radio show. His popularity grew so quickly that within a year he was the star of his own magazine	**1** **Music Television** MTV was launched on this day in 1981, and kicked off with the words 'Ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll', followed by the music video for The Buggles' *Video Killed the Radio Star*
2 **I Love You Philip Morris** Jim Carrey takes a break from Hollywood crowd-pleasers to play a con man who falls in love with his cellmate in this comedy-drama. Pick it up on either DVD or Blu-ray in the UK from today				**6** **Knight and Day** Tom Cruise turns action hero again in this blockbuster about a secret agent on the run and the woman (Cameron Diaz) whose life he enters. Catch it at cinemas across the UK. **www.knightandday.com**	**7** **Happy Birthday!** South African actress Charlize Theron turns 35 today. Why not mark the occasion by revisiting the underrated 1996 thriller *Two Days in the Valley* on DVD, in which she steals the show in the role of a sexy femme fatale?	
		**11** **The Sorcerer's Apprentice** Feel the magic in UK cinemas today with the release of this FX-laden tale starring Nic Cage as a sorcerer looking for an apprentice in modern day NYC disney.go.com/disneypictures/sorcerersapprentice		**13** **Scott Pilgrim Vs The World** Edgar Wright helms this quirky adaptation of Bryan Lee O'Malley's cult comic series about a slacker who must fight his new girlfriend's 'seven evil exes'. Out today. **www.scottpilgrimthemovie.com**		
16 **Centurion** Neil Marshall's action adventure about a small group of Roman soldiers fighting their way to safety through enemy territory will be carving a bloody swathe on to DVD and Blu-ray today. **www.centurionmovie.com**	**17** **Getting animated** This day in 1908 saw the release of Emile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*, a French short running for a little over a minute, which is now cited as being the first fully animated film ever made	**18** **Marmaduke** Owen Wilson sullies his reputation, by voicing the titular dog in this live-action adaptation of the popular newspaper comic strip. Masochists can track it down at UK cinemas from today www.themarmadukemovie.com	**19** **R.I.P** The master of rapid-fire comedy 'Groucho' Marx passed away on this day in 1977, at the age of 86 after being hospitalised with pneumonia. Revisit him at his best by checking out the Marx Brothers movies transferred to DVD.	**20** **The Expendables** Stallone + Statham + Jet Li + Dolph Lundgren + Crews + Rourke + Schwarzenegger + Willis + Steve Austin + Randy Couture = Best Film Ever. In UK cinemas today. **www.expendablesmovie.co.uk com**		
23 **The Innocents** Don't be dissuaded by its 12 certificate, as this 1961 chiller, based on Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, remains one of the most terrifying psychological horrors ever made. And today it hits Blu-ray in the UK!			**26** ***HCC* #186** Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed to the gills with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews. www.homecinemachoice.com			

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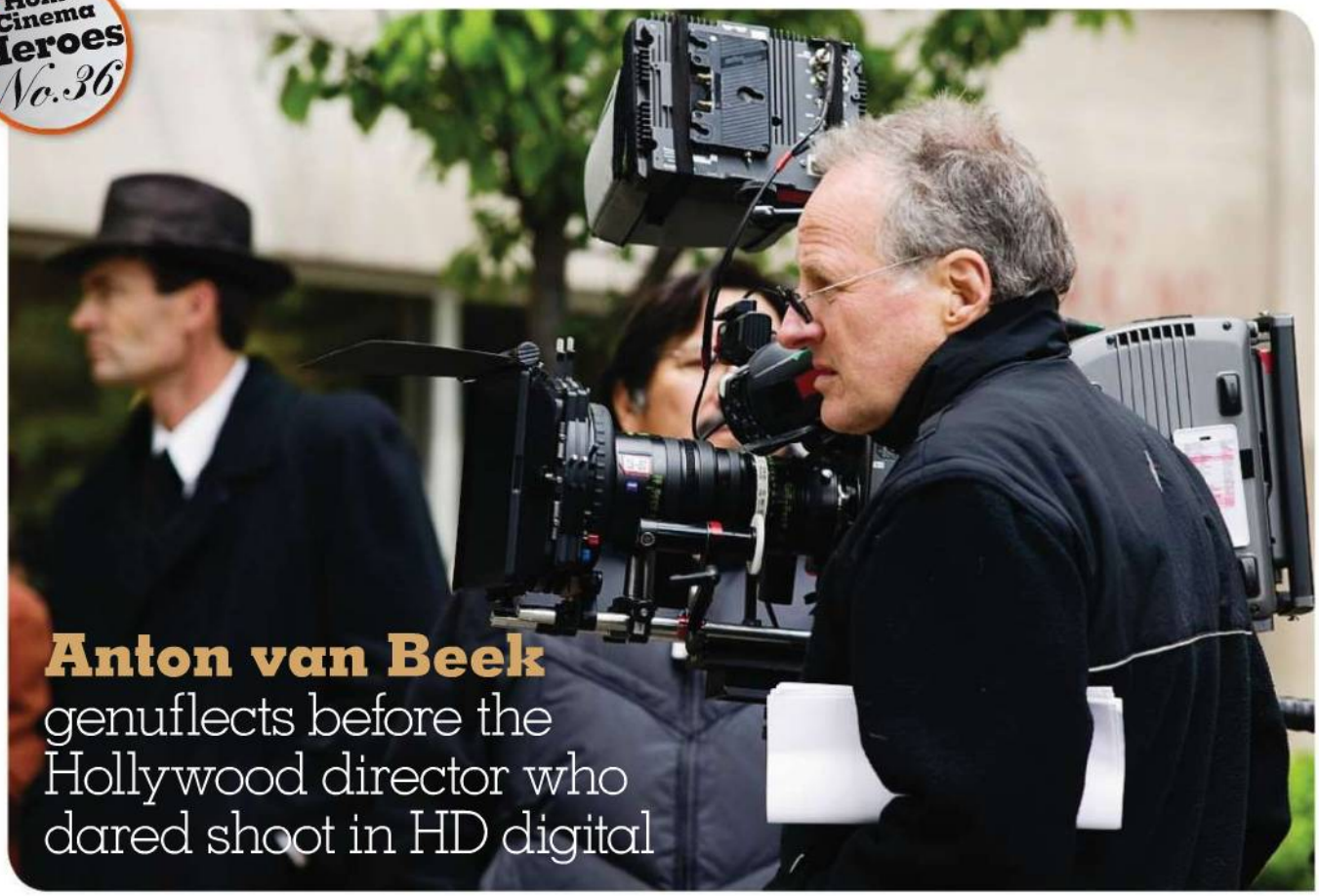
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Home Cinema Heroes No.36



Anton van Beek genuflects before the Hollywood director who dared shoot in HD digital

O, lucky Mann

Unlike the majority of directors we've raised to the rank of Home Cinema Hero over the past few years, Michael Mann doesn't have a massive body of work to draw upon. Despite turning 67 this year, he only directed his first feature film in 1981, and since then has gone on to direct only nine further movies.

Yet, even with this relatively small filmography Michael Mann has become one of the most celebrated filmmakers currently working in Hollywood. He ranked fifth in a UK critics' poll of Top 10 Directors of the Last 25 Years in a 2002 issue of *Sight & Sound* magazine, when he had only made six films. So what is it about this director that leaves both critics and audiences enthusing about his work?

For us, it's the simple fact that Mann's films are studies of obsession in both the characters that inhabit them and in the way the director himself creates the world around them. His protagonists are always professional men at the height of their chosen careers, more often than not pitted against an equally professional opposite. The most obvious examples occur in Mann's crime films, where we see this in men operating on either side of the law – characters who have more in common than they have differences. What often links them is a dream of families or personal relationships, but in many cases this only serves to upset their carefully constructed lives and eventually brings about their downfall.

Modern times: Digital technology puts Mann in the action as a hands-on director with a camera



The last detail

But what really sets Mann apart as a director is the effort he expends in creating the places these fascinating characters inhabit. With the possible exception of his underrated and studio-butchered 1983 horror film, *The Keep,* (still, criminally, unavailable on DVD) all of his films look and feel completely authentic. Supporting this sense of verisimilitude is the fact that no detail or process is too minor to be explored in depth. And he isn't afraid of possibly alienating some audiences by using specific jargon to add to the authenticity of a scene without clueing the audience in.

All of which makes for a thrillingly visceral, 'realist' form of filmmaking that feels completely different from anything else in Hollywood.

And that's before you take into account Mann's adoption and ongoing use of high-definition digital video to shoot his work, which undoubtedly makes the material look more real

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Quintessential Michael Mann *Heat's* opening heist



1 Flipping out
'It's very difficult to turn over an armoured car,' claims the filmmaker, so the gang uses a heavy truck



2 Ruthless operators
'The idea here is that this is a group of guys who are cold and skilled, but mostly are high-line pros,' says Mann



3 Plan comes together
They get into the armoured car and find the $1.6million in bearer bonds they were after without any hitches...



4 Nervous twitch
...Until one of the gang starts to get trigger-happy and needlessly kills a guard, setting the cops on their tail

Must own...



Miami Vice
Universal Pictures → All-region Director's Edition BD (US Import)
Mann's 2006 update of the TV series was a thrilling crime drama that refused to speak down to its audience by serving a simple slice of escapism.
01.19: What says Miami more than a powerboat race? Sure it's all part of a police sting, but it also serves to show off the HD visuals and audio a treat.
120.21: It's not quite on par with *Heat*, but this gritty shootout shows that Mann still has the goods when it comes to action scenes. And the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio packs a real punch as well.



Heat
Warner Home Video → All-region BD → £20 Approx
This 1995 crime thriller is easily Mann's most celebrated movie – despite being essentially a remake of his 1989 TV movie, *LA Takedown*. Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino star as the career thief versus the workaholic cop.
107.33: A weighty Dolby TrueHD 5.1 accompanies this epic shootout on the streets of LA.
158.22: The conflict between cop and robber finally comes to a head as the two play cat and mouse in the darkness of the LAX freight terminal. .



Manhunter
Momentum Pictures → R 2 Special Edition DVD → £20 Approx
This 1986 thriller is the best film adaptation of Thomas Harris' *Hannibal Lecter* novels. It has been rediscovered on VHS and DVD, and viewers can savour the performances from William Petersen, Tom Noonan and Brian Cox.
21.33: Brian Cox's Hannibal is a far subtler, less hammy, study of terror than Hopkins' famed take on the role.
60.17: 'You will lie awake in fear of what the Red Dragon will do'. The Tooth Fairy teaches a journalist not to print lies about him.



Collateral
Paramount → All-region BD → £20 Approx
Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx star as a hitman and the taxi driver who ends up driving him around LA in this cracking thriller. Mann shot many scenes on an HD camera, evolving this method throughout his subsequent movies.
00.52: Look, it's Jason Statham delivering Vincent's package. Is this a nod in the direction of an as-yet unseen *Transporter* crossover?
19.00: Max's meal is interrupted when one of Vincent's targets drops in somewhat unexpectedly.

Worth seeing...



Thief
Optimum Releasing → R2 DVD → £16 Approx
Mann's impressive noir-tinged debut theatrical feature stars James Caan as Frank, a career thief who dreams of building a new life with a cashier he has begun dating. However, his life is thrown into disarray when he agrees to do a job for a high-level crime boss.
30.30: 'I wear $150 slacks. I wear silk shirts. I wear $800 suits. I wear a gold watch. I change cars like other guys change their f***ing shoes! I'm a thief'. Caan's safecracker lays his cards on the table for his new girlfriend.



Public Enemies
Universal Pictures → All-region BDs → £25 Approx
This flawed Depression-era crime drama tells the true story of FBI agent Melvin Purvis' (Christian Bale) attempts to bring gangster John Dillinger (Johnny Depp) to justice. But Mann's *Heat* is a more successful telling of a similar story.
01.29: The film opens with a thrilling prison break as Dillinger helps his gang escape from Indiana State Prison.
85.06: The cops finally catch up with the gang in another great action scene. But, the Blu-ray presentation is marred by some anomalous shimmering.



The Last of the Mohicans
20th Century Fox → R1 DVD Director's Expanded Edition → £10 Approx
This historical epic made Mann one of Hollywood's A-list directors. As film packed with lush widescreen vistas, plenty of action and a spectacular star turn from Daniel Day-Lewis as the heroic Hawkeye.
00.01: Even the Fox logo is marred by print damage and dirt on this DVD. We want the a Blu-ray!
75.54: The British troops are besieged by Huron fighters, leading to a bloodsoaked woodland battle.

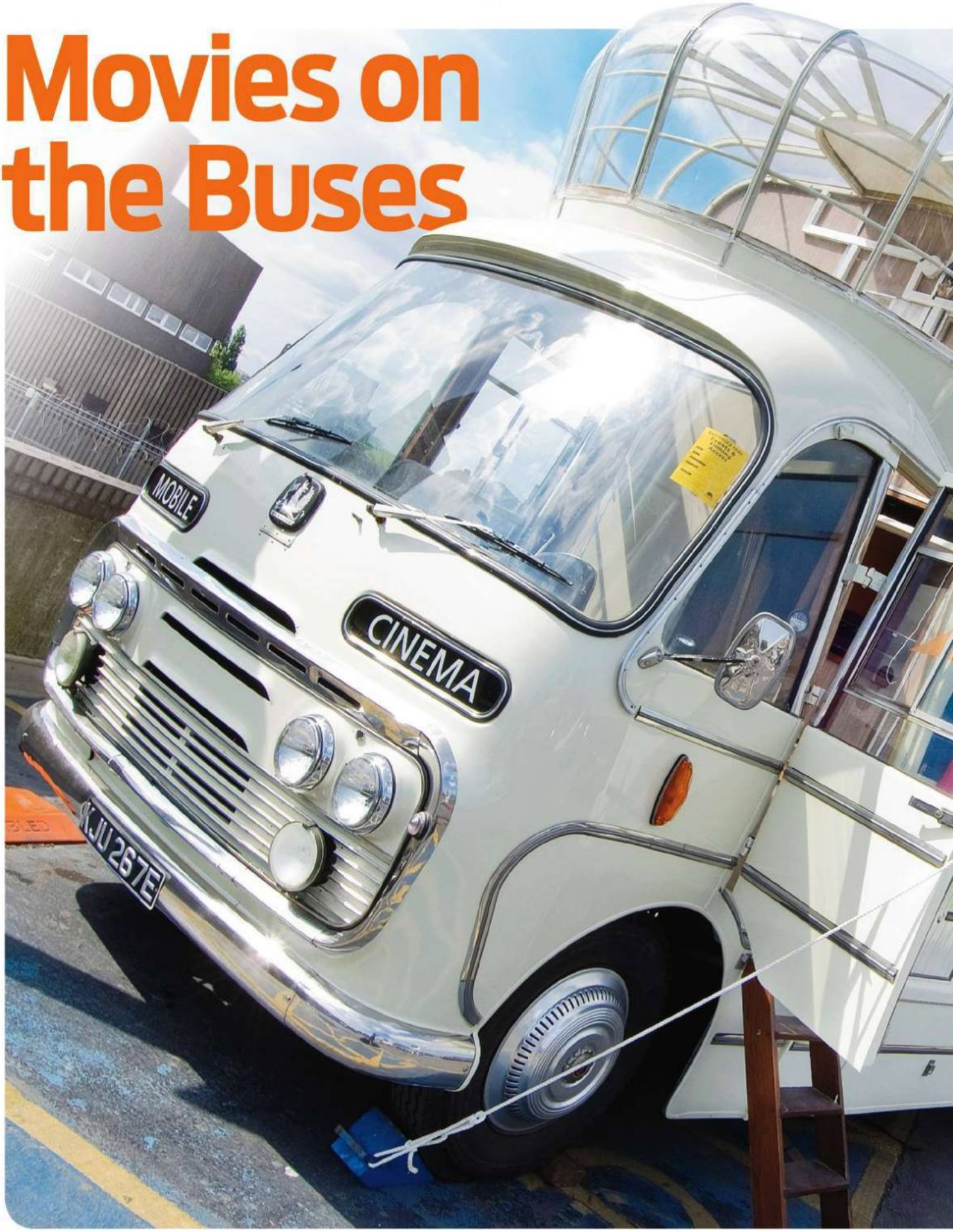
Avoid...



Ali
Entertainmentin Video R2 DVD → £20 Approx
For some reason this fails to come together. Will Smith is brilliant and the film undoubtedly looks spectacular, but the story lacks much of the spark and verve that made Ali himself such an electrifying and divisive character.
11.28: Mann's focus on minutiae and methodology is evident in the sequence leading up to the film's opening fight between Cassius Clay and Sonny Liston.
132.40: The film excels when Ali starts boxing, as the climactic fight against George Foreman shows.

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Movies on the Buses



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Not all buses terminate at Cemetery Gates. **Jim Hill** got a ticket to ride in a newly tooled digital mobile cinema

Back in the 1960s, the British government commissioned seven Bedford buses to promote the country's film industry. Each one was expertly kitted out with the latest electronics and projection systems to showcase the nation's technological superiority. It was our last hurrah as it turned out, and, after just two years of service, the fleet was scrapped – leaving one solitary mobile cinema.

Thankfully, lucky number seven was rediscovered slowly falling apart on a farm in Somerset. That's when Ollie, a visual art student with a passion for vintage vehicles and home cinema, fell for its rusty charms and bought it for the modest sum of £1,200. It took five years of painstaking restoration and a further £30,000 to coax the old girl back into service. Where time had taken its toll, local mechanics (Hills Body Works) were able to reconstruct the necessary panels.

Recently, with a little help from his friends, Ollie was finally ready to fire up his unique slice of British heritage for *Home Cinema Choice,* ahead of the Bedford's first public appearance in more than 40 years.

Chugging into the digital age, the source and display electronics are now all Japanese, with Full HD projection and 7.1 surround sound to dazzle punters.

In the cab, the original teak woodwork gives a clue as to how the bus was used at the time, with narrow shelves designed to hold the old film reels that would be fed into to the big 35mm film projector. This would have fired through a hatch door in the cab into the converted trailer, keeping the noisy mechanism away from the audience.

With the short-throw ratio of modern projectors, Ollie had to install his chosen Epson EH-TW3500 inside the trailer section, along with the seven Mordaunt Short speakers and subwoofer.

Another cabinet in the cab housed the old amplifier and early VCR, and now provides a perfect space for the modern electronics. Even back then, 430mm was the standard width of AV components, which meant a perfect fit for the Onkyo TX-NR807 receiver and Pioneer BDP-320 Blu-ray player. Ollie overcame the problem of overheating by installing two fans to blow cooler air from beneath the cab.

Turning the trailer from a casual screening room with just a few of the original coach chairs remaining, into a 22-seat cinema, was Ollie's biggest challenge. 'It took a long time to work out how everything was going to fit in there,' he explained.

The internal proportions of the old Bedford actually suit the cinema very well. With the projector firing down its length and filling the seven-foot screen at the end, there's just the right amount of room to fit six tiers of seating without compromising anyone's field of view. The Mordaunt Short speakers were selected for their compact size as well as their accurate sound placement.

Scrapheap challenge

The 'new' seating was salvaged from a reclamation yard in Somerset and >

Kit Checklist

Onkyo: TX-NR807 receiver
This 7-channel AVR is a solid AV performer, and with its HDMI inputs mean Ollie can easily add other sources to the cinema
Pioneer: BDP-320 Blu-ray player
Mordaunt Short: 2 x Aviano 6 floorstander speakers
Mordaunt Short: 1 x Alumni 9 subwoofer
Mordaunt Short: 1 x Alumni 5 centre speaker
Mordaunt Short: 4 x Alumni 3 surround speakers
Epson: EH-TW3500 LCD projector
Epson's 3LCD projector is a quiet runner – measured at 22dB – so it's a good choice for this room, where it's ceiling-mounted

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the cavity below the rear tier is just the right size for a subwoofer. 'The back right seat is the crowdpleaser', said Ollie, indicating the one that's right above the upturned sub, 'but being coupled to the chassis, it can actually make the whole bus shake'. Kind of like a budget D-Box system, then!

The walls are carpeted with an acoustic barrier to keep the raucous lossless audio in, but the soft material actually helps the internal acoustics, too. Dimmable lighting, much of which is mounted in the original fittings, sets the ambience inside the cinema.

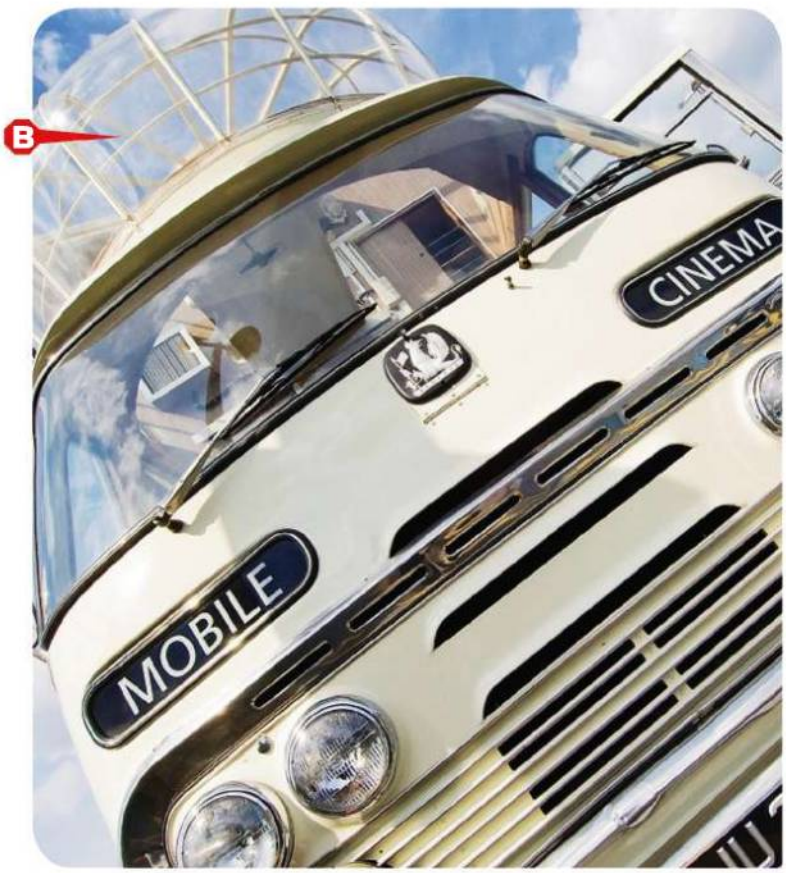
The updated room now delivers Full HD video and 7.1 surround sound with real aplomb. A quick demo of *The Hurt Locker* on Blu-ray proved the point convincingly.

At the moment the fully-restored Bedford shows mostly archive footage to curious members of the public, as **the licence fee required to show a feature film makes public screenings prohibitively expensive**, but Ollie's business plan is still taking shape.

All aboard

If you see this mobile cinema trundling through the West Country or chugging to events and music festivals around the United Kingdom, we recommend you hop aboard for a piece of British transport history and a unique cinema experience – upcoming performances, and a full history of the old Bedford bus, are available on the Vintage Mobile Cinema website











A Modern marvel
Ollie's vehicle now features a state-of-the-art Blu-ray/projection home cinema

B Old timer
This futuristic-looking glass dome is where the projectionist would have originally sat

C Room for everyone
There are 22 cinema seats squeezed into the Bedford, all salvaged from a scrap yard

D The Graduate
Ollie has specced Mordaunt Short Alumni speakers for the 7.1 system. We assume in-walls were a definite no-no!

E Short stuff
Because of this Epson LCD projector's short throw ratio, it had to be sited in the rear of the bus, rather than in the cab

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These photos feature just a small selection of Musical Images' installation work over the past 20 years.

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Urban play area

Anton van Beek finds a town apartment that has a family viewing room to suit both kids and adults

North London-based Olive Audio Visual picked up a CEDIA award for Best Media Room under £15,000 for this stunning pro install and it's not difficult to see why. Created as part of a whole-house solution, this multi-functional room proved to be the most challenging part of the entire project. It needed to be both a home cinema for a family with four children, plus a media room, playroom and homework den.

Working closely with the architect, the team from Olive was able to deliver a suitably discreet audio visual solution that took into account the minimalist décor of the room itself. Bowers & Wilkins flatpanel speakers with acoustically transparent fabric covers were used at the front of the room to maintain the aesthetics, and these were paired with in-ceiling speakers to handle the rear audio for the 5.1 system. And, when it came to mounting the 60in Pioneer Kuro screen, the team came up with a custom-built cabinet that was lacquered to match the finish of the screen exactly.

Disc dilemma

Another major issue for the owner was the problem of lost and damaged discs that comes with mixing young children with DVDs.

The initial solution was to include a Kaleidescape movie server alongside the Blu-ray player and Sky+HD set-top box, but given the relatively small size of their (playable) DVD collection, the former was soon dropped in favour of Apple TV. This is now the family's favourite part of the project, thanks to the large selection of on-demand HD films and TV shows – to the extent that they ended up buying more than 100 movies from the iTunes store within the first six months of having the room.

We just hope the children who use it so frequently will end up becoming home cinema addicts themselves...

Batten the hatches: The flatpanel loudspeakers seamlessly meld with the minimalist interior styling

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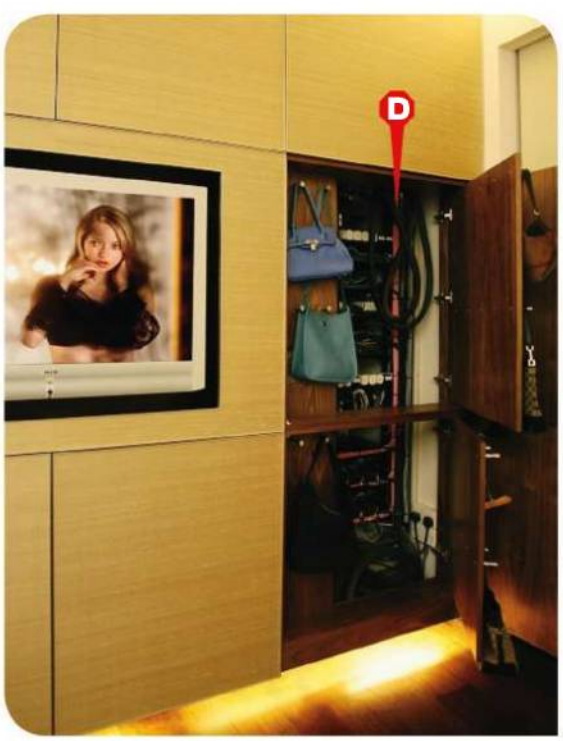


→ Kit Checklist

Pioneer: PDP-LX6090 60in full HD plasma TV
Pioneer: 60in plasma bracket
Panasonic: DMP-BD60 Blu-ray player
Apple: Apple TV
Sky: Sky +HD set-top box
Harman Kardon: AVR-255 AV receiver
Crestron: MLX-2 2-way ZigBee RF remote
Crestron: CEN-RFGW-EX-PWE ZigBee Gateway
Bowers & Wilkins: 1 x FPM4 2.5-way flatpanel loudspeaker
Bowers & Wilkins: 2 x FPM5 2.5-way flatpanel loudspeakers
Bowers & Wilkins: 2 x CWM 650 in-wall loudspeakers
Audio Pro: All-room 150W subwoofer







Room essentials

A Keeping it simple
A Crestron MLX-2 remote controls all of the automated kit in the room, including the lights and blinds

B Nothing to see here
In addition to the centre/left/right B&W flatpanel speakers, this custom cabinet also hides the downward-firing Audio Pro All-room subwoofer

C Whole-house chic
This neighbouring room maintains the same sleek look as the central AV space, and includes its own wall-mounted Sony screen with access to Apple TV

D Backside story
While the front of the kit-rack can be accessed from the media room, this is undoubtedly one of the cleverest touches. The neighbouring room features a slim wardrobe that hides additional access to the back of the rack

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REVIEWS

→Hardware highlights **SAMSUNG** Premium-priced 'statement' TV **SONY** 3D-ready Bravia TV and 3D Blu-ray spinner **LG** 55in Infinia with 3D with 'magic wand' remote **PIONEER** Affordable AVR with iPhone control **Q ACOUSTICS** Bookshelf 5.1 system **JVC** New flagship projector **GROUPTEST** A trio of Freeview HD PVRs do battle **AND MUCH MORE!**

Boxing clever

Can Denon's Blu-ray receiver offer the same AV excellence as its dedicated separates? Turn to p62 to find out



HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 **5**
Above average	1 2 3 **4** 5
Acceptable	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Dire	**1** 2 3 4 5

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Designed for another dimension

The hyper-expensive Series 9 LED 3D TV is Samsung's most audacious TV ever. **Steve May** is bowled over by its boldness



It seems fitting that Samsung unveiled the UE55C9000 at the prestigious Saatchi Gallery in London. This home of contemporary art proved an ideal venue for what is an extraordinary example of consumer electronics design. When the company's executives pulled the covers and revealed the TV for the first time, gathered celebrities and tech commentators cooed together in appreciation.

Measuring just 7.98mm thick, with a glinting aluminium chassis, the set is more guillotine than gogglebox. But it's also brimming with the latest audio visual technology. It is, in short, Samsung's most ambitious and audacious TV ever. And at £7,000, it's also one of the most expensive on the high street.

Visually the set is stunning, with jaw-dropping attention to detail. The back of the UE55C9000 is in many ways as striking as the front. A chromed hump joins the brushed aluminium panel to its pedestal stand; rivets artfully hold the thing together, but there's no sign of air vents. It's an inspired piece of engineering. Inevitably, the panel itself is too thin for AV inputs, so these have been ingeniously worked into the rim of the stand, as has the TV's sound system. As this is too small to support many of the inputs required, the set ships with a selection of adaptors, which come with pinch-locks to secure them in place. Space is tight. HDMI leads can be connected directly (there are four inputs), but component, Scart and phono AV inputs need adaptors. At the side of the stand are USB ports, one of which is for a supplied Wi-Fi dongle, which can be used to take the set online and/or to connect the fancy touchscreen remote for additional functionality.

AV/CV

Product: High-end edge-lit LED 3D Freeview HD TV

Positioning: The most luxurious 3D screen in Samsung's expanding 3D TV line-up, and one of the most striking screens produced this year by any manufacturer

Peers: Panasonic TX-P50VT20; Sony 60in KDL-60LX903

Net-savvy

The UE55C9000 is fully network compliant. I hooked up via Ethernet (by far the simplest way to get networked) and could immediately see my other networked uPnP/DLNA devices. Naturally the screen will also pull media from attached USB devices. File support is wide, and includes hi-res MKVs.

Once online, you can also use Samsung's Internet@TV portal, where you'll find the ubiquitous YouTube, Facebook and LoveFilm apps plus simple games. Samsung's own App store promises more functionality later this year.

The TV's user interface is excellent. Hi-res graphics guide you around your content-viewing options and the TV listings GUI is excellent. Unlike Panasonic's current screens, which have their listing guide compromised by advertising, Samsung's alternative (also powered by Rovi's Guide+) is clean and expansive.

Picture quality is hugely impressive. While the set uses Edge-LED backlighting (hence its impossible thinness), there's no obvious unevenness with the illumination. Images are as sharp as a Juk Jang Chang (obligatory reference to Korean martial arts weaponry).

Image clarity is often startling. There's an unforgiving clarity to its images which I found mesmerising. Black levels are very good and colours vibrant. The Blu-ray of *Avatar* is arguably the most striking hi-def release this year in terms of resolution and fidelity, and on this Series 9 model it looks simply tremendous. Detail zings and colours ping. Visiting Pandora is an almost hallucinogenic experience. Images from the Freeview HD tuner are equally spectacular.

To evaluate motion resolution, I subjected the UE55C9000 to a test pattern developed by the Advanced PDP Development Centre. With a still image, this confirmed that resolution is clean at 1080 lines. During motion, however, some detail is lost, with definition reduced to around 850-950 lines depending on the settings deployed on the screen (engage LED Motion Plus for the best results). Overall, this can be considered a significant >



Lens flair: Samsung's 3D spex are comfortable to wear... but fragile

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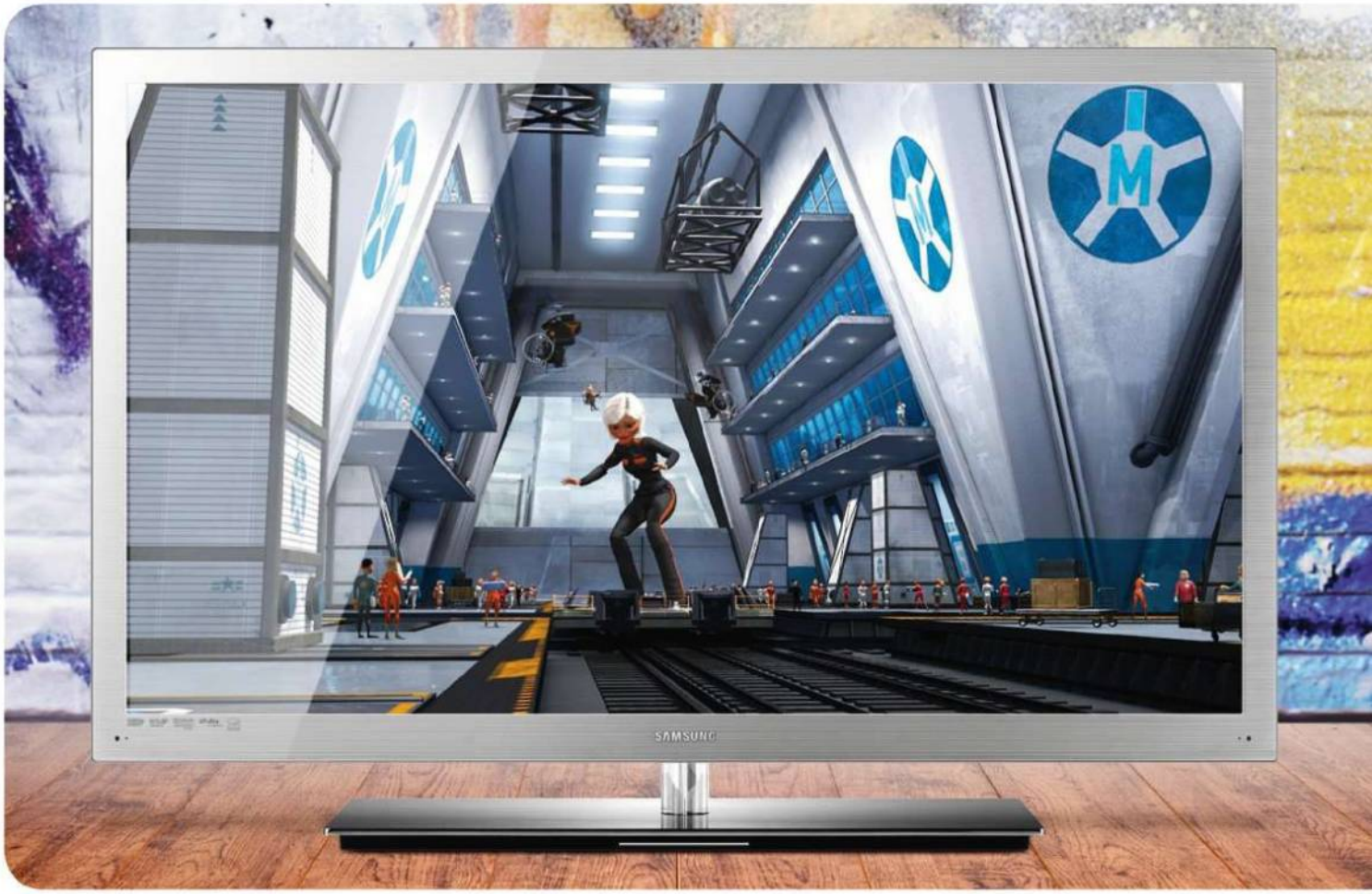
→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
3D: YES Active Shutter – one pair of Active Shutter glasses supplied
Tuner: YES Freeview HD (and CI slot)
Component: YES one set – via adaptor supplied
HDMI: YES four HDMI v1.4
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 30w (2 x 15W)
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): N/A
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1,295.6(w) x 784.4(h) x 33.9(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 20.4kg
Features: 2D-3D conversion for all sources; Internet@TV portal; Wi-Fi touchscreen remote; LED edge-lighting with Dual Black Insertion; 2x USB; DLNA network streaming compliant (JPEG, MP3, DivX, MKV, AVI support); Wi-Fi and Ethernet connection – wireless LAN dongle supplied; supplied low-profile WMN1000B wall mount

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improvement in motion resolution over some LCD panels we've seen.

Curiously, there is no picture mode on the set which gives you 1:1 pixel matching. Every viewing mode features an element of overscan. As there really is no need for overscan when playing Blu-ray, there should be at least one mode which offers it.

Naturally, as the range-topper in the Samsung TV line-up, 3D compatibility is a major draw. The panel is compatible with all current 3D formats: Full HD 3D, side-by-side, top and bottom and checkerboard. LCD screens need a high frame rate for 3D to be effective. Unlike plasma, a 120Hz refresh rate just doesn't cut it. There's too much overlap between the left and right images. Doubling the refresh rate to 240Hz is mandatory. Samsung elaborates on this with a technique called Dual Black Insertion. Instead of a left/left/right/right image refresh, we get left/black-frame/right/black-frame. There are two benefits from inserting this black frame: motion appears crisper and image retention between frames is reduced.

We auditioned the set with a small selection of 3D Blu-ray discs (*Monsters Vs Aliens* is bundled with Samsung's 3D glasses, which are sold separately), the Xbox 360 game of *Avatar* and, of course, Sky 3D.

Sky is currently producing some interesting 3D material. A series of 3D shorts are being broadcast which are tremendously revealing. One is a speeded-up view of London, with plenty of skylines and architecture. This kind of subject matter is ideal for revealing crosstalk, a double-image effect created when picture information in the left/right frames overlap. Here, the 9000 was found wanting; if you look for crosstalk, you'll find it – take a look at the steeple during the opening sequence of *Monsters Vs Aliens* 3D BD. Stop searching for it, though, and you soon become engaged in the 3D effect; the sense of depth is excellent.

All 3DTVs are currently locked to 3D glasses supplied by the same manufacturer. So their appeal is tempered by their spex-appeal. Samsung's SSG-2100ABs embrace B-movie futurism when it comes to

Silver surfer: This high-end screen has a high-end finish, too





A prettier standard of interface: (from left to right) Easy access to the TV's many features via an animated carousel; the clean easy-to-use TV listings UI; hi-res graphics; play a CD and cover art is pulled in by Gracenote

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design, but they are more comfortable than most. The balance is good, and they don't absorb as much light as some rival glasses. Consequently, images retain more mid-grey and shadow detail when seen in 3D. Prescription spectacle wearers might find them a tight fit, though, when they double up.

Please take care with these glasses as they are not robust. I found this out during the audition process. My advice is not to place them on a sofa in a darkened room...

With so little 3D content actually available, the 2D-to-3D conversion mode has undeniable appeal. Such conversion technology is rapidly becoming a hot topic in the industry, and I have mixed opinions about it. For the most part, indiscriminate dimensionalisation is an unrewarding viewing experience because the results are so unpredictable. However, at times it can be quite fun. If you stick to HD and are prepared to experiment, you will discover some good effects. Typically, if the source material was originally shot for 3D (*Avatar* is a prime example) it'll work better than most; and cinematic material generally looks better than TV fare.

There are several ways manufacturers can achieve 2D-to-3D conversion. The simplest is to use an algorithm which divides an image vertically, bringing the bottom slice to the fore, treating the middle as mid-distance and top as far distance. The Samsung is slightly different. Its algorithm is based on depth processing. An image is broken-down into 96 segments and analysed for depth separation. It's then layered and split to create a stereo image. However, when you do the conversion, the picture develops thin vertical black bars left and right.

In many ways, the set's audio performance is its biggest surprise. The 9000's form factor meant I had already written off its audio potential, but the inventive placement of drivers in the pedestal creates a quite acceptable noise. It doesn't suffer from the phone-call thinness of rival slim-screens, and for general use the stereo spread is effective.

There's no doubt that **the Series 9 stands as the crowning glory of the Samsung's TV design and technology divisions**. It's in many ways an extraordinary product which warrants its lofty position in the range, and it's a great example of just how accomplished an LCD can be – none of Samsung's main TV rivals have a comparable 'statement' product. As a feature-packed set it represents the leading edge in functionality. To see one is to want one

Touchscreen Trial

Getting to grips with Samsung's remote

In many ways the supplied Touch Control (available as an optional extra further down the Samsung TV range) is as adventurous as the UE55C9000 itself. And like the superslim screen, it has genuine wow factor, but in use I found it to be rather less desirable. Looking much like an iPod Touch, it can be used in a variety of ways: as a standard IR zapper or as a Wi-Fi augmented controller than can display TV programmes and guide, plus streaming media.

For the latter to work, the handset has to be paired over Wi-Fi with the screen. You can partner it to the dongle itself or with your wider Wi-Fi network. However, despite several days of trying, I failed completely to achieve this. In what I eventually concluded to be a cruel reference to my social life, the TV would only spout 'Failed to Connect' messages. Now I'm quite prepared to be called a doofus, but I have an extensive wired/Wi-Fi/powerline driven home network with literally dozens of items connected – and I add and remove products on an almost daily basis. While the set has an intuitive user interface for most of its functionality, its Wi-Fi communication skills are woeful.

Even if you do succeed in partnering the remote over Wi-Fi to the set, there are other more fundamental problems. Navigation is difficult. It's incredibly easy to hit the wrong part of the screen. As the right-hand side of the directional navigator is right next to the Exit button, I continually hit the wrong graphic. Battery life is also limited, typically only just lasting the day. Once depleted it has to be tethered by USB to a wall socket for recharging.



Handy: The glitzy remote looks gorgeous, but will take some getting used to

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Power consumption with our 100IRE test is good for a set of this size. Eco Sensor and Energy Saving modes reduce it further



Test footage: In full movie mode the Samsung draws an average of 175W

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Contrast in the default natural mode is excellent. Switch to Dynamic and it increases to397,000:1 Luminance in Natural mode is 37.4fl.

Colour accuracy



Presets: The Warm 2 preset is acceptable; the Advanced Settings menu has a 'white balance' option with full R/G/B offset and gain adjustments. We used these to achieve 6500K from the Warm 2 setting.
Cool: 11,500K
Normal: 10,500K
Warm 1: 8,200K
Warm 2: 7,000K



HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE55C9000
£7,000 Approx

Highs: Stunning design and build quality; blisteringly sharp 2D image; advanced multimedia playback abilities; smooth 3D; good audio
Lows: Wi-Fi touchscreen remote frustrating to use; crosstalk 3D artefacts evident

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Cut-price combo rides the 3D wave

Sony's entry-level 3D TV and prudent Blu-ray player have been designed to save you pounds. **Steve May** assesses the brand's 3D frugality

Sony may be making a belated splash with 3D, but at the very least it looks committed with no fewer than three full TV ranges, of which the HX800 series, reviewed here, is its mainstream proposition. All the HX803 models need to be teamed with a separate IR emitter and 3D glasses (available as an accessory bundle) before you can go three dimensional. As Sony's Tim Page explained, when delivering the set to *HCC* Towers, 'these sets are for those that want to add 3D at a later date, or just want to future-proof their new TV purchases.' The HX803 comes in 40in and 46in and variants.

The step-up HX903 series comes in 46in and 52in screen sizes and has Full Array LED backlighting. The brand's so-called Signature range, also known as the LX models, are available as 40 and 60in screen sizes. They are Dynamic Edge LED screens and ship with two pairs of Active Shutter glasses included.

The HX803 is only 7.4cm deep and sports a regulation gloss black bezel, but build quality is a tad ordinary. The set itself can stand straight or, as per many other Sony models this year, tilt 6° backwards (in case you have a fashionably low TV stand). It all depends on how you assemble the pedestal stand.

A Home button summons the main Xross user interface, while Options pulls in a complete list of options from the right hand side. The Input button pulls in a map of sources from the left.

AV/CV

Products: Entry level 3D-capable TV and 3D Blu-ray player

Positioning: The HX803 sits below the LED backlit HX900 and Signature LX range; the BDP-S570 is one down from the glossy S770

Peers: Samsung 40C7000; Panasonic TX-50VT20; LG 55LX9900

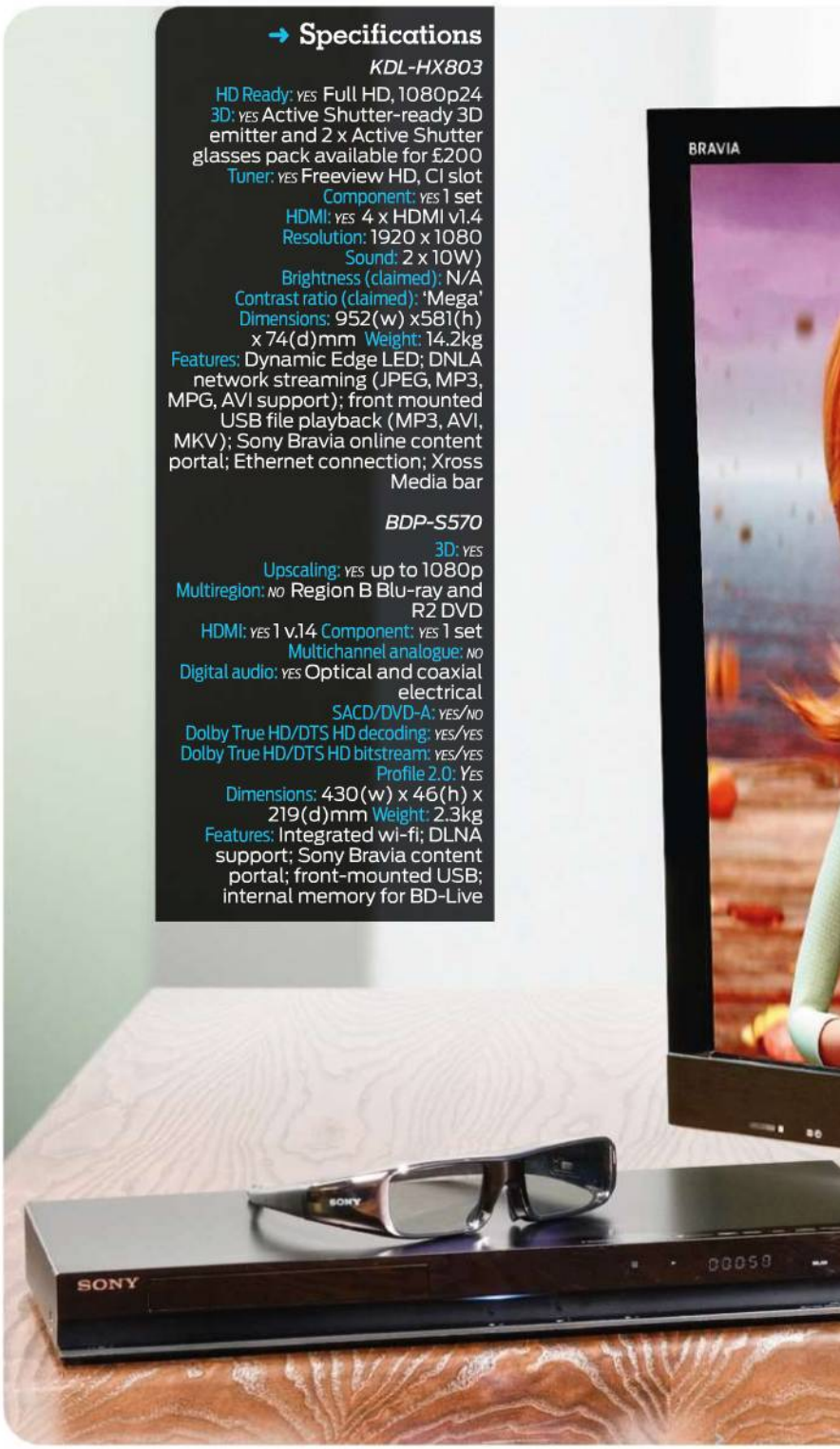
→ Specifications

KDL-HX803

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
3D: YES Active Shutter-ready 3D emitter and 2 x Active Shutter glasses pack available for £200
Tuner: YES Freeview HD, CI slot
Component: YES 1 set
HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI v1.4
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 2 x 10W)
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 'Mega'
Dimensions: 952(w) x581(h) x 74(d)mm Weight: 14.2kg
Features: Dynamic Edge LED; DNLA network streaming (JPEG, MP3, MPG, AVI support); front mounted USB file playback (MP3, AVI, MKV); Sony Bravia online content portal; Ethernet connection; Xross Media bar

BDP-S570

3D: YES
Upscaling: YES up to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 1 v.14 Component: YES 1 set
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES Optical and coaxial electrical
SACD/DVD-A: YES/NO
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES
Dimensions: 430(w) x 46(h) x 219(d)mm Weight: 2.3kg
Features: Integrated wi-fi; DLNA support; Sony Bravia content portal; front-mounted USB; internal memory for BD-Live



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In awe of the S-570

I partnered the screen with the BDP-S570, a £230 3D Blu-ray player. Like all of Sony's 2010 models, the deck is Super Audio CD compatible. You have a choice of outputting two-channel SACD via phono or multichannel over HDMI. If you hook it up with a (Sony) AVR able to take DSD over HDMI you'll get a digital stream from the disc, which is really neat. If the player interrogates the AVR's EDID data and discovers that it cannot handle DSD, the player outputs multichannel PCM instead.

Other attractions, according to Sony, include its network talents and audio visual performance. 'The build quality is highly considered,' Sony's man made sure to let me know, explaining, 'circuit tracks are nice and short and architecture is tidy.'

The more I used the S570, the more I was in awe of it. There is only one model above the BDP-S570, and that's the S770 (typically £30 more at retail). Differences are largely aesthetic: the top of the S-range model has a high-gloss cabinet to better match the brand's 3D TV range, but beneath the hood it's essentially the same player.

There is quite a large caveat, though. You'll not want to own it unless you have (or soon plan to buy) an HDMI v1.4 compatible receiver.

Take your pick: Sony has created a TV that will enable you to upgrade to 3D whenever you wish



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Unlike the Panasonic DMT-BDP300 and Samsung BD-C6900 3D players, there is no provision for routing lossless audio (DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD) to a non-HDMI v1.4 AV receiver, while still preserving the 3D video signal path. Your only option if you route the HDMI straight to the screen is to use a lossy optical/coax digital audio lead, which carries only DTS/DD5.1.

Networked entertainment

Sony has aggressively developed its online content portal, Bravia Internet Video. Hook up the HX803 to the internet via the Ethernet connection, or an optional wi-fi dongle (UWA-BR100) and you'll encounter a number of free and pay-TV content options. There's Demand 5, YouTube, Eurosport, LoveFiLM, trailers, DailyMotion plus copious other stuff.

Like the BD player, the HX803 also makes much of its DNLA network certification. However, its home network and streaming functions are far less straightforward than the Bravia 'net portal.

The set is happiest with local storage media. Plug in a USB flash drive and it'll find and play more common video file types, including AVIs and MKV HDs. It even plays out SRT subtitle files. However, over the network it's a different story. The only video files it seemed interested in were MPEGs. It certainly couldn't see or play AVIs or MKVs from a NAS. MP3 audio playback over the network was fine.

The Blu-ray player had much of the same functions, but added it's own level of confusion. While the Bravia Internet interface is consistent, the portals differ slightly: BBC iPlayer features on the BD player (with HD), but it is currently missing on the TV (but expected soon).

As a media streamer, the S570 behaves much like the television with comparable File playback limitations. Across the network, my MKVs solicited a 'Not Playable' dialogue box, while AVIs ran well enough (and SRT subtitles were ignored). None of my test video files were recognised from a front-loaded USB and only MP3 and AAC music tracks were actually playable. This may be a sample fault, however.

There is some nice integration with the Gracenote Database: play a CD and the album art is retrieved. There are also some visualisation modes, although these are so ponderously slow, I can only conclude they have been designed purely to accompany soporific classical tunes and soft jazz.



Getting with 3D

To add the third dimension you'll need to spring for the emitter plus a pair of glasses, which together will add another £150 onto your bill.

The IR emitter plugs into what looks like a deformed S-video connection on the rear of the screen. It uses no fewer than 15 infrared transmitters, offering 3D viewers a wide theoretical spread.

Picture-wise the set can be considered good in both standard and 3D modes, with some reservations. The set uses 'dynamic' LED edge-lighting, but only across the top and bottom of the screen.

Back to black: The screen stands straight on the pedestal or can be tilted to suit your viewing habits

All decked out: While the HX803 TV falls short of Best Buy status, this 3D BD deck is highly recommended



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Eight eyes are better than two: Two pairs of glasses are avaible in a bundle that brings 3D togetherness

The LED backlights get an automatic boost when in a 3D mode, and to aid 3D image smoothness and motion clarity, Sony repeats each frame twice in a left/left/right/right sequence. Out of a 3D picture mode, this changes to more conventional frame interpolation.

I auditioned the screen with both 3D Blu-rays and Sky 3D. Overall, I was impressed with the sense of depth, and appreciated the fact that alterations to brightness and tint caused by the 3D glasses are not too disastrous for picture integrity.

The big issue when it comes to 3D on LCD panels is crosstalk, which manifests itself here, although attempts to disguise it are partially successful. In scenes with fast moving action, you'll not be able to spot crosstalk all the time, although you will occasionally notice the double imaging effect.

As with Samsung's 3D sets, the Sony range offer '3D upconversion' of 2D sources. Ostensibly, this gives viewers starved of content something to watch with their spex. However, I was very unimpressed by this processing mode. A good deal less convincing than the 2D-to-3D mode on the Samsung, it makes images look decidedly unnatural. I tried it out with source material as diverse as HD, Blu-ray and games, but nothing was very successful. I don't see myself revisiting it for casual viewing.

Getting the best picture performance from this set takes some care. Out of the box, images look fizzy and unrefined. On all settings, I spotted obvious digital noise, though this can be quickly removed via the sharpness control, which should be reduced to its minimum setting. It's important to realise that altering the Sharpness control does not affect actual image clarity. Indeed, taking it right down removes the kind of digital fizz and edge enhancement which destroys genuine detail.

A typical brightness setting should be no more than 45 on the sliding scale, with contrast set high (there's no bloom to worry about with LCD).

After a period of calibration I felt quite happy with the picture. Hi-def images from its Freeview HD tuner had visual pop, good greyscale and black level, along with plenty of texture and depth. Overscan has also been perfectly judged. You can watch in any of the three picture modes and know that nothing is being obscured by the bezel.

Where the set does have a weakness is in motion resolution. While still image resolution comprises a full and clear 1080 lines, this erodes with motion. A scrolling monoscope image revealed the picture stressed with movement, while test patterns lost cohesion.

In real world viewing, this isn't as horrible as it might sound, but clearly there is lost detail when viewing fast motion. Bear this in mind, if you're looking for a set primarily for sports.

The Blu-ray player is getting short shrift in this review, which is undoubtedly unfair. From a picture performance point of view I thought it very good, particularly given the price point. **The inclusion of SACD is a major plus point. Anyone with a collection of these discs will be thrilled.** Perhaps it might even encourage more releases in the format.

The player has IP Noise Reduction to help clean up low-bitrate internet video sources, but does not have the kind of highly expensive video processing seen on last year's BDP-S760. The only catch is that missing secondary HD audio output.

Flexible friend

It's not difficult to see where Sony is coming from with the HX800 range. A 3D-capable model that the buyer can upgrade whenever they want makes sense. But the TV has to be keenly priced to start off with, and it needs to undercut rival screens with integrated IR emitters (there's no aesthetic plus point to having a separate emitter). So check carefully before buying.

As a regular 2D set, the HX800 is solid enough, with commendable network content options, but it's a shame that its local networking skills are less developed

The prudent BDP-S570 comes with fewer reservations. The most affordabel 3D BD player currently out there, it's also the best, as long as your amp supports HDMI v1.4

→ Tech Labs

KDL-40HX803

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: A fairly low consumption for a set of this size

Test footage: Just under 100W is still reasonable for a set this size with its speakers at full pelt

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: An impressively high contrast ratio, notwithstanding the meaningless 'Mega' claims, and a peak luminance of 50.61fl to boot

Colour accuracy



Presets: A small selection of CT presets, none particularly accurate, but manual R/G/B gain and bias settings make accurate adjustment possible
Neutral: 8458K
Cool: 9032K
Warm 2: 5946K
Warm 1: 7186K

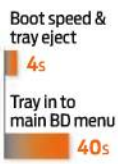
BDP-S570

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: A solid jitter figure for a non-audiophile product

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Speedy booting and disc loading – Sony has addressed past criticisms



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-40HX803/BDP-S570
£1,800 (plus glasses/emitter bundle)/£230 Approx

Highs: BD deck is brilliant value for money; 3D upgrade is a sensible option; solid HD performance
Lows: Screen is clearly built to a budget; motion blur evident; 2D-to-3D conversion unconvincing

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Dainty diodes work the 3D magic

LG enters the 3D arena with its latest flagship TV, but as **John Archer** finds, there's more to it than that



LG is officially no longer a budget brand. Its new 55in 55LX9900 is one of the most expensive TVs (for its size) we've ever seen from any brand. The mind boggles at just what the screen must have under its bonnet to justify its price tag.

This is the first time we've seen a 3D TV from the brand and it's a full HD active-type model, a distinction we need to stress because LG, uniquely, also offers 3D TVs that use passive, non-HD 3D tech.

As you might reasonably expect for £3,700, the 55LX9900 ships with two pairs of LG's 3D glasses. And unlike some of the spex we've tried so far, LG's are quite comfortable, even for long periods.

A clue to the screen's other big price justifier is in its splendid design, since, despite using direct LED tech, it's exceptionally thin at only 31mm.

LG has cunningly managed to marry the potentially superior picture quality of direct LED technology with the slimness (including a remarkably narrow bezel) associated with edge-based LED lighting. LG is the first brand to achieve this killer combination with such panache.

The set's connections reflect LG's ambition for this TV, because along with four 3D-friendly HDMIs, it has two USB ports for multimedia file playback, a D-Sub PC jack, an RS-232 port for enhanced integration of the TV into a wider home control network, and an Ethernet port that can access future services from the built-in Freeview HD tuner, stream content off a DLNA PC and hook into LG's currently impoverished NetCast online platform.

There's a further port for adding LG's Wireless Media Box, which transmits from your sources to the screen, up to full 1080p HD. Great though this is, it would have been nice to find the wi-fi system included as standard on a TV costing £3,700.

Expensive extras

There's another disappointment, too. For the set doesn't feature built-in wi-fi; instead you have to add this by coughing up yet more money for an optional USB dongle.

The 55LX9900 gets back on track, though, with its onscreen menu system and vast quantity of picture optimisation tools. These are so prodigious, in fact, that the TV has secured an endorsement from the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF), so a professional installer can calibrate the TV for you.

The colour management system offers adjustments, which enable you to play with the brightness and contrast of the red, green and blue colour elements, and the saturation

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES including 1080p/24
Tuner: YES Freeview HD and analogue
Component video : YES 2 inputs (one side)
HDMI/DVI: YES 4 v1.4 HDMI inputs
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub
Resolution: 1920x1080
Sound: 2x10W
Brightness: N/a
Contrast ratio: 10,000,000:1 (native)
Dimensions (off stand): 1256(w) x 750(h) x 32(d)mm Weight: 28kg
Also featuring: 400Hz (200Hz plus scanning backlight), DivX/MPEG video playback, JPEG photo playback, MP3/AAC audio playback, ISF support, Magic Remote control, optional wireless AV system, optional wi-fi, Bluetooth support, gamma adjustment, colour management, NetCast online service, various 3D platforms supported, Picture Wizard, Energy Saving mode, multiple AV presets, noise/digital noise reduction, black level adjustment, clear white mode

AV/CV

Product:
An ultra slender direct LED TV

Positioning:
LG's flagship TV. There's a 47in model too, with non 3D, 200Hz step down models in the 8900 range. Edge LED 3D models are also available - the 6900 series.

Peers:
Samsung UE55C9000; Sony KDL-52HX903

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and tone of the RGB, cyan, yellow and magenta image components. Also immensely helpful is a selection of gamma modes, plus all manner of tweaks for improving contrast, sharpness, noise levels and colours.

The presentation of the onscreen menus is outstanding, too, featuring oodles of intelligible icons and graphics that are sensibly laid out. There's even a Picture Wizard, which guides you through picture fine tuning via some built-in test signals.

Another clever touch LG has introduced with this TV is the simple 'Magic Remote'. This works like a WiiMote, enabling you to select onscreen items simply by pointing at them and pressing a button.

One last 55LX9900 feature to consider is its supposed 400Hz system, which is actually 200Hz with a scanning backlight. However dubious the 400Hz labelling, though, we can still hope that it will deliver clean, fluid motion reproduction.

In many ways the 55LX9900's pictures are startlingly exceptional. As with all direct LED-lit LCD TVs we've seen to date, bar Sharp's LE600 and LE700 models, this set employs local dimming, to control the brightness of each LED cluster individually. This results in a truly exceptional contrast performance, where rich black colours can sit side by side with aggressive, crisp whites to a degree normal CCFL LCD TVs can only dream about.

The deep black level response remains very consistent right across the screen as well, with no really obvious brightness hot spots.

This extreme contrast performance additionally helps the 55LX9900's colour reproduction, to produce some of the most dazzlingly rich and vibrant tones we've seen from a flat TV. Colourful HD games such as *Avatar* and animated >

Girls aloud: there's nothing uniform about this TV because 'local dimming' controls brightness in small areas

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Don't hit me: Two pairs of active shutter glasses are bundled with the TV

Blu-rays like *Up* look sensationally intense and dynamic, even during their darker moments.

Crisp and even

The TV also handles motion exceptionally well, with the '400Hz' engine smoothing and clarifying the passage of moving objects across the screen, while generating precious few side effects – provided you don't set the motion options too high.

HD pictures are clean and rich in detail, bringing out what appears to be each vein of every leaf of alien fauna on the *Avatar* Blu-ray.

The 55LX9900's key 3D pictures have plenty going for them. They don't lose as much brightness as Panasonic's 3D plasma images and colours remain enjoyably natural.

Unfortunately, though, **the 3D pictures suffer from that dreaded LCD 3D problem of crosstalk noise.** This appears as obvious ghosting around the edges of sharply defined objects, especially those in the far distance, such as the struts of the Golden Gate Bridge during *Monsters Vs Aliens*.



Zapping made easy: The Magic Remote is gesture-sensitive

I find this noise really quite distracting and at times quite tiring on the eyes. So if I were buying a TV with the intention of watching 3D regularly, I'd be more drawn to Panasonic's VT20 models, which are virtually 3D crosstalk-free.

The 55LX9900 has one other picture issue you need to be aware of, which is the appearance of 'haloes' around very bright objects when they appear against dark backgrounds. Thankfully this issue is so subtle when you're sitting directly opposite the TV that it can't be considered a real problem. But it certainly does become troublesome if you have to watch from any sort of angle, increasing exponentially once you get to 30˚ or more from perpendicular.

Joining the 55LX9900's mostly impressive picture performance is a sadly slightly lacklustre audio effort. This is, of course, par for the course with super-slim TVs, so I shouldn't be too surprised by the distinct lack of bass it produces, or the lack of any real treble clarity. At least the mid range is fairly open, and doesn't distort even if pushed quite hard.

The 55LX9900 ultimately gets mighty close to delivering a performance to match its lofty AV ambitions. Its 2D pictures are certainly exceptional provided you spend a little time calibrating them. But while its 3D pictures are enjoyable, their susceptibility to crosstalk means they're not as good as those of Panasonic's VT20 models. Combine this fact with its very average sonics and the 55LX9900 ends up looking a bit too pricey for comfort ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts





White screen: Pretty low for a screen of this size, but that's another advantage of those lighting emitting diodes

Test footage: A measurable drop, though full speaker volume produces screechy sound

TV Contrast: Ratio



Colour accuracy



Picture: Short of the claimed figure, but still very impressive contrast ratio, and excellent luminance of 112.8fl

Presets: Only three presets colour temperature is infinitely variable in 100 steps and there are ISF Expert modes.
Warm: 6747K
Cool: 11998K
Medium: 9318K



HCC VERDICT

LG 55LX9900
£3,700 Approx

Highs: Gorgeous design; good calibration tools; outstanding 2D pictures

Lows: Seriously expensive; no wi-fi built in; crosstalk with 3D playback

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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- 1920 X 1080 Resolution
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PANASONIC DMPBDT300EG



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LG HB965TZ



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Four dimensions of fun

We review every Full HD 3D Blu-ray movie out there – all four of them!







All sewn up: While *Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* has been snapped up by Panasonic, *Monsters vs Aliens* (bottom) is currently exclusive to Samsung









Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs



This 3D incarnation of the *Ice Age 3* Blu-ray isn't available to buy in stores at the moment. Instead, Panasonic is offering the disc for a limited time as an exclusive mail-in promotion for buyers of its 3D Viera TVs.

Sabre-toothed sharpness

This doesn't mean that any corners have been cut with the disc's MVC 1.78:1 imagery, though. The picture is immaculate throughout, offering razor-sharp edges and fine detailing that really goes to show how impressive stereoscopic Full HD 3D can be. The slow-motion start to Chapter 2's deer chase is a prime example; free from the fast-cutting that can prove a little disorientating in some of the other action scenes, this short sequence allows you to really appreciate the layers of depth in the image and the crystal-clear clarity of the dual 1080p imagery. Meanwhile, the shot of a snowflake drifting to earth in Chapter 19 shows that the new encode is just as happy with the odd in-your-face effect as well. Indeed, it probably pips *Cloudy...* to take pole position as **the best-looking 3D BD disc around at the moment**.

The effectiveness of the 3D in the film is helped considerably by the film's bright palette. Although, having taken off the glasses briefly, the high brightness was so noticeable that we were left wondering if Fox hasn't ramped it up slightly to counteract the significant loss caused by wearing 3D specs. But without a copy of the original 2D BD to hand, we can't confirm any differences.

The disc retains the DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 mix from the earlier 2D release. While it's not the most dynamic track you'll ever hear, there's some pretty robust LFE on offer when the dinosaurs are on the move, and atmospheric use of the surrounds really aids the overall effect of the 3D imagery. Sadly, there are no extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Monsters vs. Aliens 3D



DreamWorks' *Monsters vs. Aliens* will find its place in the record books as the first Full HD 3D Blu-ray disc manufactured for public consumption. Not that you can actually walk into a shop and buy it. Instead, it is only available as part of a £140 bundle from Samsung, featuring two pairs of the manufacturer's active shutter glasses and a copy of the Blu-ray.

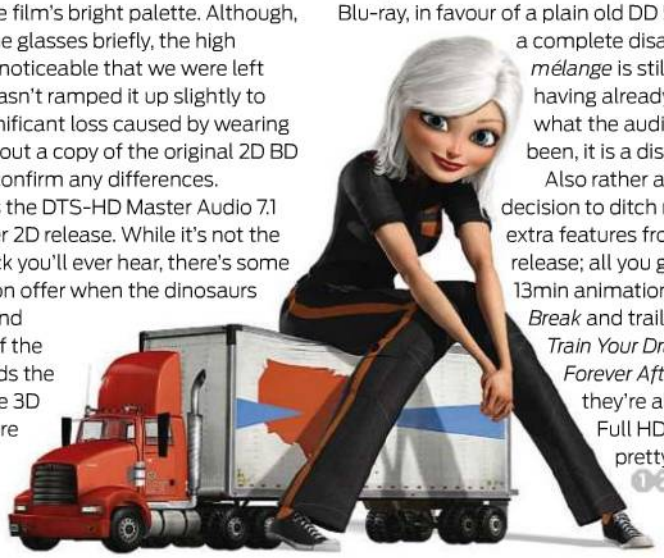
Rock group

Still, should you be in a position to take the plunge, there's much to admire about this 3D animated outing. The MVC 2.35:1 imagery looks very strong throughout, with impressive colour reproduction and fine detailing that manages the impressive feat of measuring up to the old 2D BD release. And **the film rarely misses a chance to add depth to the image right from the off**, with an opening sequence featuring a planetoid surrounded by a ring of rocks that seem to emerge from the screen. Heck, later on it even makes use of the old 3D paddleball cliché, but to see it replicated this well in a home environment makes its inclusion entirely worthwhile.

Where the disc stumbles somewhat is in the frankly baffling decision to forgo the lossless Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix that appeared on the 2D Blu-ray, in favour of a plain old DD 5.1 mix. It's not a complete disaster as the *mélange* is still engaging, but having already experienced what the audio could have been, it is a disappointment.

Also rather annoying is the decision to ditch most of the extra features from the 2D release; all you get here are the 13min animation *B.O.B.'s Big Break* and trailers for *How to Train Your Dragon* and *Shrek Forever After*. But at least they're all encoded in Full HD 3D and look pretty spiffy too.

1 2 3 4 5



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Coraline: Blu-ray 3D Edition



Like *Ice Age 3*, Henry Selick's creepy stop-motion animated feature is currently only available as part of Panasonic's mail-in promotion.

The first difference from the original 'flat' Blu-ray comes as the disc loads up, with the appearance of a forced trailer for Universal's upcoming animated feature, *Despicable Me*, presented in 3D. After this, it's a return to Universal's traditional menu structure, albeit without the option to skim through bonus features, as there aren't any. Given the generous helping that appeared on the 2D version, we can only hope that most will return when the full retail version is made available.

Tailor-made

Coraline was explicitly conceived with 3D in mind, a fact that is made obvious by the use of perspective in many shots – and this works in its favour in this new stereoscopic BD. Presented at 1.85:1, courtesy of the MVC encode, the imagery is possessed of a tangible depth, as exemplified by the placement of the camera in relation to the characters and table as Coraline sits down for dinner with her 'Other' mother and father in Chapter 4. However, one obvious problem is the fact that **the film's dark aesthetic style does occasionally dull the 3D effect when combined with the loss of brightness that comes from using 3D glasses**. It's not a major issue, combined with the emphasis on depth rather than imagery coming out of the screen (with the exception of the surprisingly effective – and noticeably brighter – opening credits), it does tend to make the 3D feel rather subdued compared to the other titles we've reviewed.

Thankfully, the deeply resonant and playful DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack that graced the original Blu-ray is replicated here. And it does an excellent job of adding some much-needed depth to the oft-lacking three-dimensional visuals.

1 2 3 4 5



Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs



This is the only 3D Blu-ray disc currently available to buy in shops (a snip at just £25), and Sony Pictures has done a superb job with its debut Full HD 3D release.

Framed ever so slightly tighter than the earlier 2D BD release (roughly 2.30:1 as opposed to 2.35:1), the new MVC encode does a sensational job of bringing the film's stylised animation to life in three-dimensions. While some shots suffer from the drop in brightness caused by 3D glasses and a few deliberately flat sequences (primarily TV footage in the film), **on the whole *Cloudy*... is packed with visual highlights**. Be it the first shower of hamburgers raining down out of the sky at the end of Chapter 4/beginning of Chapter 5 with its impressive depth, or Flint running towards the spaghetti twister and dodging flying debris in Chapter 10, the disc's 3D effects never fail to impress. And while colour reproduction takes a bit of a hit at times due to the spex, detailing is still as strong as ever.

Unlike the promotional discs reviewed on these pages, this world's first 3D Blu-ray retail release has more to offer than some new stereoscopic visuals. Not only is the DTS-HD MA 5.1 present, but so too are quite a few bonus features including a Making of... featurette, a look at the voice cast, two extended scenes, early animation tests, five animation 'progression reels', a music video with its own short Making of..., Sony's standard BD Live link and even an exclusive Full HD 3D clip from the upcoming Open Season 3D Blu-ray.

A bigger splash

Sony clearly wanted to make a splash with its first 3D BD release, and with *Cloudy*... it found the perfect film to showcase the possibilities of stereoscopic Full HD, while not forgetting to add those extra little features that keep fans so happy.

1 2 3 4 5

+Games

Jim Hill scans the games that add 3D to your PS3

Wipeout HD



WipEout HD seems the logical choice for the 3D treatment. Geometric shapes hurtling through tunnels definitely benefit from the extra dimension. It's not the most pronounced 3D effect, but it does give the game an even more thrilling feeling of speed that will have you leaning into the turns. The slick Designers Republic graphics haven't dated and there are no serious compromises in brightness or contrast in 3D mode.

SuperStardust HD



This addictive, but unremarkable asteroids update would probably go unnoticed if it weren't for the 3D update. It gives your ship a very credible perspective as you orbit a planet and destroy everything in your path. The huge rotating rocks have a real presence, and there's an insane explosion of light and debris when your vessel explodes.

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift



The single level, playable demo is perhaps the most convincing argument for 3D gaming on the PS3. The vehicles look like toys lined up in front of the TV as the scenery stretches back behind the screen. The solidity of your car gives you a much more credible feeling of crashing through the lush undergrowth. The 3D effect is heightened and the resolution bumped whenever you go to a slow motion replay.

Free for all: *Cloudy*... (right) is the only 3D BD title available in shops – and it's also the best







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Home Cinema

...so good, being there is the next best thing?

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that meets your expectations in terms of quality of picture and sound? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the

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"...the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level."



system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

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SERVICE	★★★★★
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VERDICT	★★★★★

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Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street.020 8567 8703

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040

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Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI
441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

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Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
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135 Great Western Road.
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Satellites hit the sweet spot

Alvin Gold sizes up the improvements in the latest affordable satellite speaker system from Q Acoustics

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Choice is yours: Finish options include gloss black, graphite and walnut, as well as gloss white

AV/CV

Product: Compact, modular 5.1 channel speaker package

Positioning: Upgrade from last year's 1000 system

Peers: Monitor Audio Vector 5.1; Wharfedale Diamond 10 HCP 5.1

Q Acoustics is a member of the Armour group – the umbrella name for a sprawling collection of brands, some of which it distributes while others are owned and operated in-house. Q Acoustics falls into the latter category.

In common with other budget and near price labels, the brand's speakers are designed in this country, but manufactured in the Far East, which offers the combined benefits of UK-friendly acoustic finetuning, with the kind of pricing that is readily available in China.

There is another connection too: the Q Acoustics 2000 series owes much to Karl-Heinz Fink, a freelance designer of loudspeakers and well respected in the industry as something of a 'golden ears'.

The remit of the brand is what might be described as the affordable mainstream, comparable if you like to similarly priced models from the likes of Wharfedale, to give one obvious and very prominent example. The 2000 series, which is all new, is not avant garde design by any means, and it is unlikely to be the first name to spring to the mind of the fashion conscious. But it is clearly better looking than some of the previous ranges from this marque and more solidly built, too.

The 2000 series replaces the 1000 series, and is available piecemeal or as a preconfigured system, usually as the 5.1-channel package we're looking at here.

But if you want to add extra satellites for 7.1 channels or more, or double the dose in the bass with an extra subwoofer (of which more later), this is easily done.

Shapeshifting flexibility

The design fundamentals are straightforward enough, but there is plenty of evidence of attention to fine detail, with the result that the package is easily set up to make the best of a range of room shapes and sizes. Some interesting touches help ensure that the speakers don't intrude excessively, always a preoccupation with many buyers and their other halves.

The four main front and rear speakers are identical, two-way designs. The centre speaker is bigger – longer when used in its normal landscape orientation – to accommodate a second bass driver. In all cases the tweeter is a 25mm woven polyester dome unit with ferrofluid cooling, while the bass and midband are handled by small 100mm units with cones made from a paper/mica mix. **The latter adds some stiffness to the material, to reduce distortion levels compared to previous speakers from the company.** The speakers are rear vented, with removable foam plugs, the general rule being to use the bungs to help control the bass when the speakers are very close to the rear wall. And each speaker is equipped with good quality 4mm binding post terminals – no cheap and nasty spring terminals here – which are designed so that lead up cables don't add to the speaker depth. Optional tilt and swivel wall brackets allow the speaker to be wall-mounted as an alternative to being stood on shelves; these come with detachable covers which hide the recessed terminal blocks on the bottom of the cabinets.

The subwoofer is a compact design, limited depth being made feasible by using twin bass drivers (and matching ports). It is a Class D design, which is standard practice at this price level being cheaper to implement, needing less cooling, and integrating, in this case, with a digital control system. This allows a full >

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Sub control: Switches to tweak the 2070 subwoofer's phase, crossover and more are located on the back panel

range of setup possibilities including the ability to adjust system tuning to accommodate music or home cinema, and to switch absolute phase (ie. whether the speakers 'suck' or 'blow' at the crossover frequency), and also to daisy-chain a second. The benefit of using two subs includes a more even sound through the bass region and a higher level of bass when the tap is opened wide, but the bass does not extend any further into the low frequencies.

The system works really well for its modest asking price. The satellite speakers are identical, except for the centre one, which is similar to the front and rear speakers, but more importantly, they're all consistent in sound with each other.

You won't get great sound when the speakers are first used, though; there's a rough, rather 'boxy' quality straight from the factory, but they do loosen up within a reasonable period, and after a few hours at moderate volume levels, performance becomes smoother and more fluid, with far less obvious evidence of colourations.

Treble quality is still not this system's best feature: there's plenty of detail, but some low-level roughness. But the sound holds up well when heard from off the main front axis, which helps the sound fill the listening room in a consistent way. The low frequency region – the upper bass and the midband – have real strength, and again this helps the whole system sound bold and dynamic. And while it's not the most sophisticated setup out there, it does offer clearly intelligible speech, a strong presence and good stereo imagery, plus impressive spatial effects in movies that demand them, such as the recent *Star Trek*.

The bass is a different matter as the satellites don't reach far into it, and the system is wholly reliant on the subwoofer to provide real depth and muscle in the lower register. In fact, although the Q Acoustics satellites are small, don't expect too much bass coverage from them; there are similarly compact designs whose bass reaches further.

The rated bass response of this speaker is given as 68Hz, but in practice I think this may be a tad optimistic. Of course the subwoofer plugs the gap, which is what it is supposed to do, but there is a suggestion of discontinuity around the crossover point between the subwoofer and the satellites, and as a result the lowest octave can sound 'slow' and out of character with the midband. The optimum crossover settings is close to 100Hz, but the character of the sound changes so that the sound loses punch as the subwoofer takes over the reins.

I found the system highly dependent on how it is set up, though **I applaud the design features that make setup changes easy to achieve.** In particular, the various ports can be used with foam bungs or without, the general rule being that using them gives a slightly more damped feel, which tends to work better when the speakers are positioned close to walls. More important are the various settings available on the subwoofer. The options are covered in the instructions, but my advice is not to finalise the system setup until the speakers are thoroughly bedded in.

A real movie goer

It's all down to that familiar three-word phrase – value for money. I was never fully convinced that the system would double effectively as a music system, which is one of the maker's claims, but it ticks all the boxes for affordable home cinema. It goes loud, sounds bold and dynamic and offers clear and distinct dialogue, while sporting respectable bass and attractive packaging.

Another plus point are the optional variants that could be a real pulling point in many design-conscious homes, especially as they don't cost very much more than the standard finish ●

→ Specifications

Q Acoustics 2010 satellite

Drive units: 1 x 4in bass driver paper/Mica cone, 1 x 1in tweeter with polyester woven dome,
Enclosure: Two-way bass reflex
Frequency response: 68H -22kHz
Sensitivity: 86dB
Power handling: 75W
Dimensions: 235(h) x 150(w) x 203(d)mm
Weight: 3.5kg

Q Acoustics 2000C centre speaker

Drive Units: 2 x 4in bass driver with paper/Mica cone, 1 x 1in tweeter with polyester woven dome
Enclosure: Two-way bass reflex
Frequency Response: 75Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 160(h) x 430(w) x 203(d) (mm)
Weight: 6kg

Q Acoustics 2070 subwoofer

Drive Units: 2 x 6.7in long-throw
Enclosure: Twin port vented
Frequency Response: 50Hz-150Hz (variable via low pass filter)
On-board power: 140W RMS
Dimensions: 560(h) x 195(w) x 560(d)mm
Weight: 14.6kg
Connections: 2 x phono (line level) inputs; 4m binding posts (speaker level); 1 x phono (line level) output



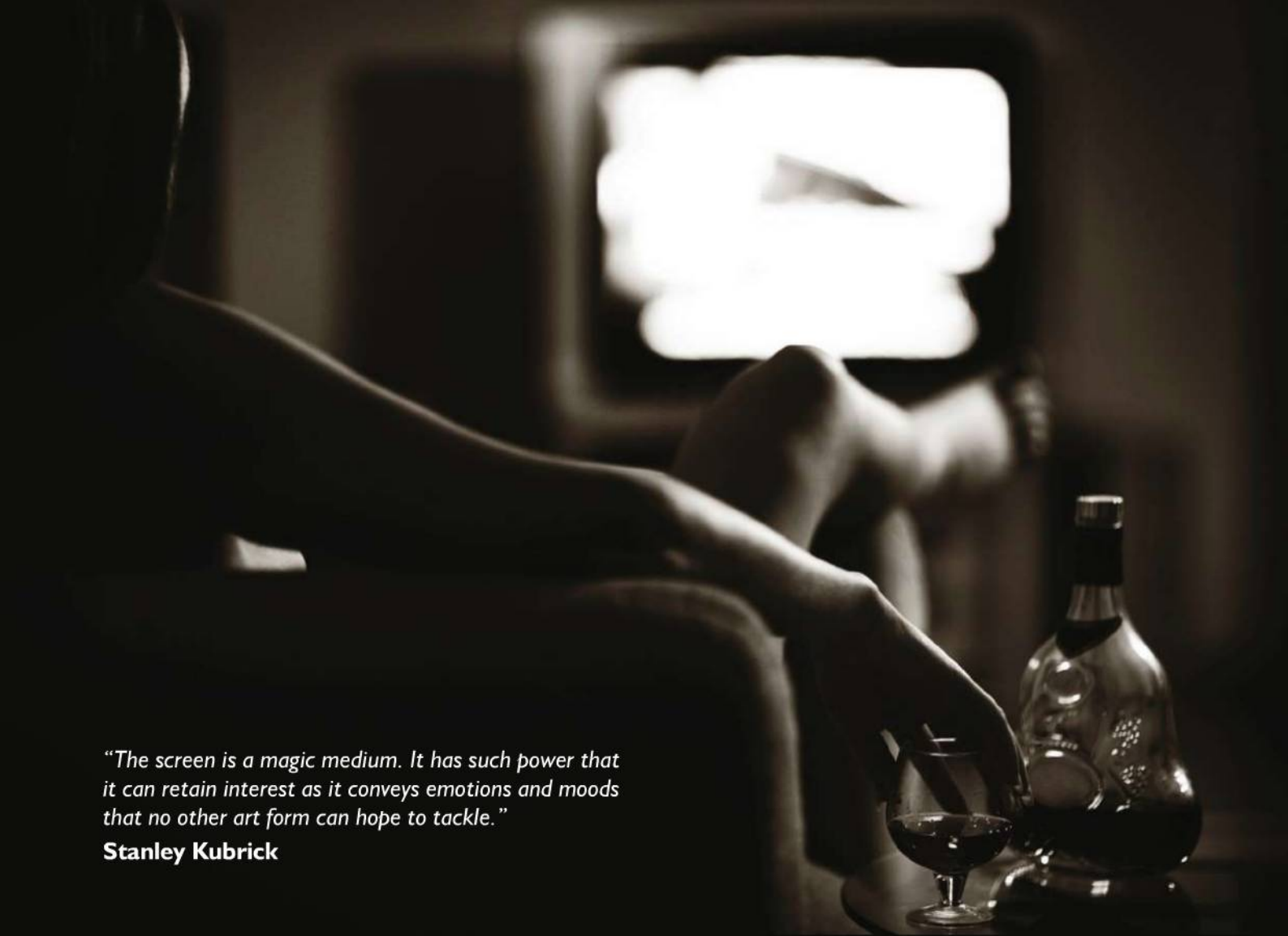
HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics 2000 series 5.1 channel Cinema Pack
Approx £550-650

Highs: Detailed, compact satellites suitable for music and home cinema; alternative finishes/supports; tweakable sub
Lows: Slightly rough sound when extended; lack of HF subtlety

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Planet of the Apps

Has Pioneer climbed aboard the gimmick wagon with its App-controlled receiver? **Richard Stevenson** samples the device's many delights



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Pioneer is probably the coolest brand in home cinema. Its sleek, cosmetically finessed designs and cutting-edge performance make the rest of the herd look positively industrial.

So how do you go about making a sub-£500 receiver cooler than a penguin's toes? The answer is simple: pack it with features and make it the first affordable machine to hit the market that can be fully controlled from an iPhone or iPod Touch with a dedicated app.

While the company's engineers will be keen to point out some of its other finer qualities, such as the seven channels amplification, stereo PQLS jitter elimination and Dolby ProLogic IIz for example, it is the VXS-920's homage to Apple's handheld goodies that really catch the attention. **Not only can the device be controlled by an iTunes app, but it also connects any later generation iPod via USB** (without an optional dock) and gets closest yet to turning it into a dedicated home server. But that's not all: it also takes a digital audio output from the device to decode within its own DACs for superior performance, and allows searching by cover art on screen, while using the supplied USB + RCA composite video lead. This is all controllable from the Pioneer's own interface, enabling you to hide the iPod away out of sight.

On the downside, the iPhone/iTouch control feature isn't quite as slick as it could be straight from the box. You need to connect the VSX-920 to a wireless router via a hard-wired Ethernet cable, and the iPhone/iTouch communicates with the receiver via wi-fi to the router and through the network.

A direct Bluetooth link up would be far better, and you can purchase the AS-BT100 adaptor for just such a scenario, although at nearly £100 it does add 20 per cent to the cost.

Able decoding

On the flip side of that argument, if you wanted to use the Pioneer's extensive vTuner web radio features, including the 24 programmable station presets, chances are you would be connected to your Ethernet connection anyway. Slightly annoying for me, is the fact that, although I have run Ethernet to the home cinema room, my 120-year-old walls are built with iron-loaded bricks that comprehensively stop the strongest wi-fi signal getting through from the office. In that case, iPhone/iTouch control just won't happen without the Bluetooth module or, without temporarily moving the router into the same room at the Pioneer.

Needless to say, the machine decodes all the major HD audio formats, has 1080p video scaling of any input, whether analogue or digital and offers v1.4 HDMI connections. The latter render this receiver 3D-compatible on account of its higher bandwidth and, more significantly, enable audio back haul that lets you amplify, for example, off-air broadcast TV without any extra cables.



An Apple a day: the VSX-920 takes audio from an iPod and decodes it with its own DACs

The latest MCACC room EQ software is fitted as standard and you can now save the data to USB stick for display on a PC rather than having to connect directly.

Setting up an AV receiver is just no fun these days; you just connect the mic, press a single button and it's all done and dusted. That's probably a good thing. The supplied remote has a rather lacklustre design, but there is a good selection of fascia controls for when the vagaries that befall handsets happen.

However, the iPhone/iTouch app more than makes up for the remote's lack of cosmetic charms in the hand. Once downloaded to my iPhone via iTunes, it connected absolutely automatically through my wireless router. No networking headaches or configuring your DNS protocol, just an immediate connection. Result!

The iControlAV App is pure class, too. It offers four screens covering basic control functions, phase and PQLS control, dialogue and bass enhancement and channel balance. The latter sums up the grace and creativity of the software, being a circular tilting table with a rolling ball representing the position of maximum sound. Roll it front left and the emphasis is front left, and so on. Great fun to play with, although I admit probably a bit redundant once you are fully set up. There are also some beautifully animated tutorials on such topics as group phase delays, which will certainly appeal to the enthusiast.

Boom, shake the room

With the MCACC and Phase Control engaged, the audio is about as



→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus DPL IIz
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES THX: NO
Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 140W
Multichannel input: NO
Multiroom: YES Zone 2 audio only
AV inputs: YES 5 composite plus stereo phono; 2 optical and 1 x coaxial
HDMI: YES 4-in, 1-out, v1.4
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 2-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 420(w) x 158(h) x 379(d)mm Weight: 10.1kg
Features: 3D-compatible v1.4 HDMI, Bluetooth ready (adaptor required), two-channel PQLS, iPod digital connect, jacket picture from iPod, iPhone/iTouch remote via App, auto level control, Internet radio presets, WMA-9 pro, glo-key cursor remote control

AV/CV

Product: Features-fest receiver with iPhone/iTouch control

Positioning: Low to middle of Pioneer's comprehensive receiver range

Peers: Onkyo TX-SR608, Denon AVR-1911

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Back pain: The VSX-920 packs four HDMI inputs on its rear, but none on the front for easy access

lacklustre as the standard remote control, if I am honest. The sound is rather too smooth and shut-in with mid bass doing a good impression of swamping the mix, despite the MCACC's complex reverb and standing wave calculations. As the ship passes overhead following the opening credits in *Serenity* (Blu-ray/Ture HD) the bass is huge and heavy-handed causing me to leap for the iPhone App volume control to back down the horses. Unfortunately, doing so made the ensuing dialogue too quiet so I had to punch it back up.

Starting again in Pure Direct mode, with all the fancy EQ systems disengaged, really cleaned up the sound, particularly the mid bass. Exactly the opposite result to what you would expect. Re-running the opening sequence of *Serenity*, the echoing, metal-walled facility where River is kept, is neatly portrayed with a good sense of both space and containment. After the escape, The Operative's voice is wonderfully cool and foreboding, with the sword effects cutting through the quiet scene with precision.

But the VSX-920 still struggles when the going gets tough, being rather too laid back to excite at low levels, and not having the power or drive to deliver the goods at high volumes. The classical music track, which accompanies *Serenity* as it flies through space, is clean and etched into the soundstage, only for the roar of the engines and the ensuing chaos of the nearby crash-landing to turn into a congested mishmash of effects. I really could not find a volume at which the VSX-920 was truly happy, and neither did it conjur any magic to really impress me with action flicks.

With less demanding material, namely a night in with *Shrek,* plus both its sequels back-to-back, with a bottle of Sandhurst vineyard's finest, the Pioneer is much more at ease. It conveys Myers' comedic Scots accent with all its quirks, and the feel-good score throughout the original *Shrek* has a good foot-tapping quality. Voices are accurate, if a little trapped inside the centre channel speaker, and there is no shortage of rather heavy-handed LFE. The soundstage is still not exactly massive, and open sky forest scenes have nothing like the sparkle and natural ambience the best sub-£500 receivers can offer.

Style over substance

The VSX-920 is not going to win any head-to-head performance shootout at £500, but you can't fault its appeal as the hub of your home entertainment. The iPod integration is great fun, and once the album artwork has loaded (this took several minutes for my stuffed 80Gb model), it stays put as long as the machine is connected. The **searching for a song by cover art is a neat touch**, and I could easily see users leaving their old iPods connected to the receiver as a fixed server when they upgrade to a new Apple iteration.

Again, sound from both the iPod and Net radio fell foul of the Pioneer's rather thick balance, making me check that my iPod's own EQ wasn't set to 'bass enhancer', as there was so much mid-bass bloom.

You have got to look at the VSX-920 as more of a lifestyle product for those who prefer gadgets and convenience above extracting the last few n'ths of sound quality. The network and iPhone/Touch/Pod features are wonderful toys, but when you are sitting down to enjoy a movie, they don't count for much

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: The VSX-920-X uses up 45W when idle.



Powered: The Pioneer sucks up a stonking 1,500W from the National Grid when in use. Watch those bills

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

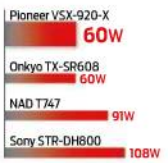


2-channel 8Ω: We measured stereo amplification at 115W into 8Ω. Pioneer claims 140W into 6Ω,



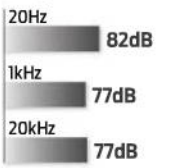
7-channel 8Ω: An acceptable 7-channel measurement for a mid-range receiver

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.06THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), this Pioneer rates very similarly to its Onkyo rival

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: Solid but not exceptional S/N measurements across the band



HCC VERDICT

Pioneer VSX-920
£499 Approx

Highs: Awesome iPhone/iTouch control App; slick net tuner
Lows: Below par sound with congested bass; short of guts, no front HDMI

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Reaching new heights

John Archer finds out if JVC's flagship HD990 projector improves on the award-winning HD950



To say the JVC DLA-HD950 projector is a tough act to follow is like saying The Grand Canyon is quite big. The lightbox coasted to victory as Best Projector in our recent *Home Cinema Choice* annual product awards, and refines the brand's already outstanding, proprietary LCOS-based D-ILA projection technology to deliver truly jaw-dropping pictures.

Remarkably, however, the HD950 is not the pinnacle of JVC's current projection range; nestled above it is the HD990.

The similarities between the two models suggest that the HD990 is only an incremental improvement on the HD950. Yet the price gap is a rather non-incremental £3.5K. So clearly we will be focusing on whether the HD990 is sufficiently better to justify such a price hike.

We asked JVC's product specialist manager, Steven Carter, to give us JVC's own take on the HD990. For a start, why bother with it?

'Because we could', says Steven. 'We were going through the selection process for the HD950's components, and we could see that the top 2 per cent of the optical systems we were producing were delivering amazing quality. So we thought we'd build a dedicated projector out of this 2 per cent and offer it to the consumer. Especially as consumers have been requesting a higher end unit over and over again.

'We're not just talking about the D-ILA device here,' Steve continues. 'In creating a 990 we take the best of the lenses, the best of the optical engines, the best of the optical devices [JVC's Optical Wire Grid system], and the best processing performance. And as long as they all work together to produce optimum quality, that's when we end up with an HD990.'

To be more specific, the HD990 offers a claimed contrast ratio of 70,000:1 versus the 50,000:1 of the HD950. That's a truly substantial increase of nearly 40 per cent, which becomes even more potentially significant when you realise these figures are all native, rather than conjured up using a dynamic iris.

Non-identical twins

As you can probably guess from the 'top 2 per cent' criteria mentioned earlier, the HD990 is a relatively niche product compared with the HD950, aimed at the custom install market and clients who want the best, more or less regardless of cost.

Aesthetically, the HD990 initially looks identical to its predecessor, which isn't a bad thing, since it finds the projector sturdily built and sporting an extremely glossy black finish. The only cosmetic touch to distinguish this lightbox from its sibling is a silver D-ILA logo emblazoned on the upper edge.

It's extremely likely, of course, that anyone buying an HD990 will have it professionally installed. But whoever does that installation should have a pretty easy time. For instance, the projector **supports a prodigious x2 optical zoom, supported by motorised optical image shifting in both the vertical and horizontal planes**. Four simple screw-down legs help you tweak any small angle issues you might have with your final image, while final focusing is also achieved via the remote, with decently fine degrees of adjustment.

AV/CV

Product: A D-ILA video projector aimed at the custom install market

Positioning: The HD990 is the flagship projector in the company's current range

Peers: The Sony VPL-VW85 and Vivitek's LED-based H9080

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→ Specifications

3D Ready: NO
HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 2 x v1.3
PC input: YES VGA
12V trigger: YES one
Resolution: 1920x1080
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI Lumens
Contrast ratio (claimed): 70,000:1 (native)
Dimensions: 365(w) x 167(h) x 477.5(d)mm
Weight: 11.2kg
Features: ISF support; THX endorsement; Colour management; Clear Motion Drive processing, gamma presets and manual adjustment; colour transient improvement, optical image shift, x2 motorised zoom, colour temp presets, manual lens aperture adjustment



The HD990 comprises the cream of optical technologies, according to JVC

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Reference Status

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The onscreen menus are appealingly businesslike in their presentation, meanwhile, and mostly well organised. And, unlike some of JVC's earlier D-ILA projectors, the HD990 doesn't skimp on its fine-tuning tricks. An essential tool at this high end of the market is a neatly presented colour management system that enables you to adjust the hue, saturation and brightness of all six of the main video colour components and stores the results into one of three memory slots.

You can also adjust the projector's block noise reduction, mosquito noise reduction and general noise reduction routines individually, switch in colour transient improvement circuitry, select from multiple colour temperature presets (including 6500K), and either choose a gamma preset, or arrive at your own gamma preference by adjusting the white, red, green and blue parts of the picture at any of 12 points along the traditional gamma curve.

Among the picture presets is a worthwhile one calibrated by the THX group. Finally, although the HD990 doesn't use a dynamic iris, it does let you manually adjust the lens aperture to fine-tune brightness based on the demands of your viewing room.

Separated at birth

So, are the HD990's pictures significantly better than those of the already exceptional HD950? Well, they're certainly noticeably better, which is no mean feat given the latter's quality.

The most obvious performance difference can be seen during dark scenes. The blackness of the backdrop to the space battle at the start of *The Revenge of the Sith* looks a couple of shades deeper than it does on the cheaper stablemate. And crucially this is achieved without simultaneously reducing shadow detailing. In fact, with stars and other bright points in the image retaining their brightness to at least the same degree as the HD950, the perception - if not the reality - is that there's actually more shadow detail.

I was surprised and pleased to note that the HD990's advantages don't end with its contrast. For its picture is also slightly crisper and brings fractionally more definition to favourite Blu-ray sequences such as the scenes outside Bond's mountain-top hospital in *Casino Royale*.

Adding to this sense of marginally boosted, but natural, sharpness is the way JVC's Clear Motion Drive processing seems slightly better. The extra fluidity the system adds feels roughly the same, but the amount of artefacting (chiefly shimmering haloes around moving objects) looks slightly reduced, at least using the Drive's low setting.



Get connected: The twin HDMI inputs will let you hook up another HD source as well as your BD deck

One final area of improvement lies with the colours, which are richer and more natural during dark scenes.

The HD990's incremental improvements (or more, in the case of black level response) produce the finest projection picture I've seen for under 10K. **Its naturalism, dynamism and sharpness are stunning, making even the most routine of films or games a joy to behold.**

What's more, the HD990 produces its exemplary images while generating remarkably little running noise. Even when sitting right next to it, I could barely hear a thing.

If I had to find an excuse to spend more money, I'd say the HD990 isn't a high-brightness 'light cannon' such as the sort of machines produced by Sim2 and Runco, costing in excess of £10K. So it's a little more limited regarding the screen size it can drive and the amount of ambient light it can contend with. The bottom line with the HD990 is that it succeeds in making one of the best projectors we've ever seen appreciably better and that's all we could fairly expect.

You could also argue that the HD990's small but numerous improvements might not quite add up to £3.5k's worth of difference between it and the HD950. But I'd argue that if you're lucky enough to be able to consider stepping up from £5.5k to £9k, matters of quality are likely much more important to you than mere financial concerns.

The bottom line with the HD990 is that it succeeds in making one of the best projectors we've ever seen appreciably better ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: With our white 100IRE screen, the JVC uses 213W.



Test footage: We measured an average 213W with test footage, too.

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: A brilliant contrast performance, with a high 35,674Fl luminance, and a significant improvement over the 950, which measured around 26,000:1.

Colour accuracy



Presets: The 990's presets were consistently a little hot, but full manual adjustment of R/G/B/C/Y/M is available.
5,800K: 6,314K
6,500K: 6,989K
7,500K: 7,855K
9,300K: 9,387K



HCC VERDICT

JVC DLA-HD990, Approx £9,000

Highs: Extraordinary black levels; excellent sharpness; good design
Lows: Not that bright for its price point; £3.5k dearer than the HD950

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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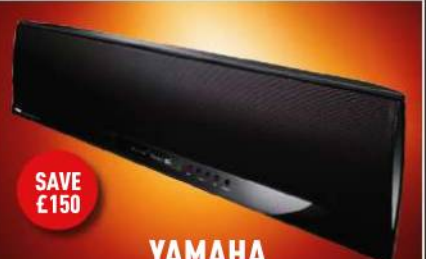
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Class balancing act tips up well

A feature-rich Profile 2.0 Blu-ray system coupled with a five-channel digital amp? **Richard Stevenson** sees whether they rub along or would be better going their separate ways



There are a lot of people out there who want great home cinema performance that combines convenience with style.

They probably don't read this magazine and will shop at a Bose store or a B&O retailer for their next system. They most likely wear Jimmy Choos, only drink premium-priced wine and most likely have friends called Tarquin and Jemima, too.

→ Specifications

Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *Yes/yes*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *Yes/yes*
3D BD: *No*
Multiregion: *No* Region 2 DVD, *yes* BD/R
SACD/DVD-A: *no/no* A shame, really
THX: *No*
Multichannel audio: *5* x 75W
Multichannel input: *No*
Multichannel output: *No* Only stereo RCA for rear-back or DPL IIz Height, plus sub
Multiroom: *1* additional audio and video zone
AV inputs: *2* composite and S-video inputs, (2 optical/1 coaxial)
HDMI input/output: *Yes/yes* 3-in, 1-out, v1.3 in, and v1.4 out
Component input/output: *No*
Video upscaling: *To* 1080p
Profile 2.0: *Yes*
Dimensions: 434(w) x 117(h) x 365(d)mm
Weight: 7.8kg
Features: DeepColour/x.v.Colour; iPod connection; Audyssey auto setup; Dynamic EQ and Dynamic volume; Ethernet port; USB port; Dolby Virtual Speaker for 2.1 surround sound; Dolby ProLogic IIz processing; assignable power for front channels in 2.1 mode; twin-sided learning remote; one-touch play over HDMI CEC, 12V trigger, remote in/out; FM/AM tuner

The average *HCC* reader, however, is an enthusiast in pursuit of home cinema perfection, who's happy to put up with multiple AV boxes, a matted mess of spaghetti cabling, huge speakers and multi-user interfaces that look like the flight deck of Branson's space ship.

Mind you, there are probably a lot more that fit profile A, in fact. So you can see Denon's thinking with the Cara S-5BD system. Why not bundle together a lot of its enthusiast level home cinema technology in a sleek and convenient, one-box Blu-ray/receiver? So, on paper at least, the Cara offers Denon's premium performance along with B&O's looks and the simplicity of Bose. Open the *Chateauneuf-du-Pape*, Rodney. I feel a touch of class coming on.

The Cara is at the top of Denon's more mass market S-series and puts a fully specified Profile 2.0 Blu-ray mechanism at the heart of a new five-channel digital amplifier.

Using some clever electronics, when this is run in two-channel or 2.1 mode, it doubles the available current supply to the main left/right channels, affording greater headroom with stereo music or when using its built-in Dolby Virtual Speaker mode. There is Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA onboard, of course, plus a suite of Audyssey EQ options, including Dynamic Volume, to reduce the volume level of those pesky loud adverts.

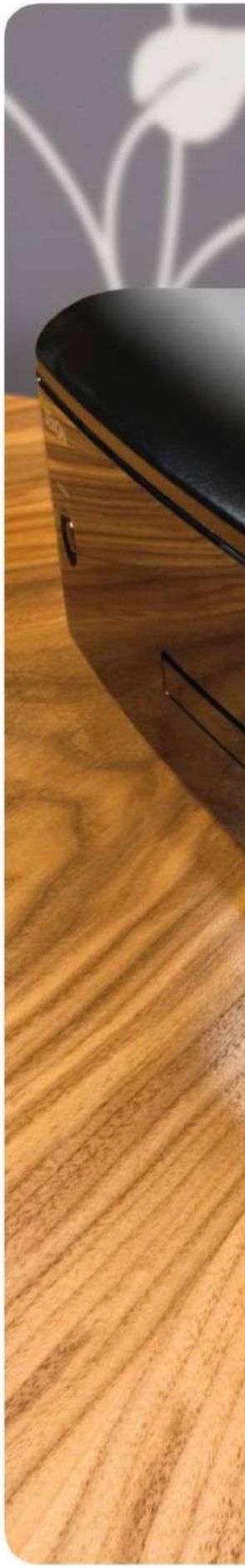
Unlike competing B&O products, no loudspeakers are supplied with the Cara. As Denon is very much a global brand, this affords the greatest flexibility of speaker choice, particularly as the amp can drive speakers of down to 4Ω. Of course, if forced to recommend a loudspeaker, Denon might suggest something from Boston Acoustics – also part of the D&M empire.

Lovely, like latex

The Cara's case is super-sleek, curvy and finished in the sort of shiny black that reminds me of oiled rubber, but that's just me. There are only six control buttons on the fascia's upper edge, a single volume knob, a subtle blue display and a lip at the back of the case to hide the cables. This is understated sexy.

In practise, though, it's not quite as polished. **I was damned if I could read the small, dim display in a lit room from more than a few feet away.** The stag-beetle side doors, covering additional connectivity, also require the fingers of a 10-year-old pianist to open. My chubby digits simply wedged between the unit and the shelf it was sitting on.

Technically, Denon has lifted several technologies and features from its separates ranges to elicit class-leading performance. The disc mechanism is a fully damped system with metal gear trays, and is fitted low and central for the best vibration resistance and lowest centre of gravity. The workings are divided into shielded sections to avoid crosstalk between the disc mechanism, DSP, digital amplifier and analogue stages,



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The Cara system is an ideal partner for a compact 5.1 sub sat system

AV/CV

Product: Profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/ receiver with five-channels amp

Positioning: Top of Denon's affordable S-series

Peers: None, really

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and the circuit boards are created with the shortest possible signal paths. You get Denon's proprietary AL24 processing, hot 32-bit DSPs and latest onscreen user interface. Interestingly, this is almost a complete import from Denon's top-spec Blu-ray machines and receivers, to the extent that the two menus for disc and amp control are completely separate. So much for ultimate simplicity and convenience; you have to come out of one menu and then go back into the other.

The back panel is suitably adorned with gold plated connections, including v1.4 compliant HDMI output (although the inputs are v1.3a), 12v triggers, an RS232 interface and a light sprinkling of analogue and digital inputs.

Denon's proprietary iPod dock port has been upgraded on the Cara and will now automatically switch to the correct input, fire up the last track the device was playing and push the music through its excellent compressed music enhancer. One fundamental pain is that the switching between 2.1 and 5.1-channel output. The manual states this is automatic, but somehow I managed to set it up that this could only be achieved manually – and the instructions didn't say why. I assume that is something to do with the extra switching required to push more current to the front channels in two-channel mode, but it seems like a huge *faux pas* to me.

Foolproof setup

Setup is handled by Audyssey, using the supplied microphone, and the system casually detected that I had managed to wire a surround speaker out of phase while in a Monday morning fug. The remote control is one of Denon's two-sided affairs with lesser-used functions hidden behind a flap on the underside. The GUIs are suitably gorgeous, although the Blu-ray one runs far slower than the amp menus. While the hard-wired networking over Ethernet sets itself up easily, on kit like this I'm prompted to ask where they put the Wi-Fi.

I can't say I was really excited to be slipping in the first disc, as 40W amps (75W into 4Ω claims Denon) don't impress me much. Thankfully, the eye-wateringly good HD picture lets you forget the vagaries of the spec sheet with an image that's comparable with what some of the best Blu-ray decks have to offer.



Tricky manoeuvre: The stag-beetle side doors are fiddly to open, making one of the HDMI ports and the USB hard to access

Flipping heck, it is really good. Fast action sequences in *Avatar* (Blu-ray) pan across the screen as if they are on rails and the colour is supremely well balanced. There isn't quite the chromatic punch or inky black depths of my reference Denon DVD-A1UD, but it gets frighteningly close.

A romp through *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* on DVD also revealed a very pleasant surprise – the 1080p scaling is excellent. The image is crisp and dynamic with good edge definition and a real HD feel, particularly on close-up shots of



Connections

A 3D no go

The HDMI inputs are v1.3, meaning you won't be able to use the Cara's AVR features in conjunction with a 3D Blu-ray deck

B Return to sender

The Cara's single HDMI output is v1.4, however, meaning you can use the Audio Return Channel to route your flatscreen's sound back to this receiver without the need for additional cabling

C That's all folks

This receiver offers amplification for a 5.1 system, so fans of the 7.1 mixes on Blu-rays may be disappointed unless you want to hook up a separate stereo amp to these pre-outs

D Radio star

Use these antenna inputs to bring the Denon's onboard FM/AM tuner into play

E Going Live

The Cara is, naturally, Blu-ray Profile 2.0 – hence the Ethernet jack. But note you can't use this to playback media files stored on your network

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character's faces. Frodo's huge eyes and Gandalf's wayward grey hair seem to gain a whole level of texture and detail and the overall picture balance is right down the middle. There is a slight lack of impact in the picture, serving to flatten the perspective somewhat, but it's a minor gripe.

The *Legends of Jazz* Blu-ray proved a trickier feast for the Cara to digest, not least because the downright sluggish disc menu handling serves to make track selection rather cumbersome. Skipping to Marcus Miller's *The Panther* the sound gains more body. **It is rich and warm with fulsome bass and a top end that airs very much on the safer side of neutral**. Bass is quite heavy going when attached to a big set of floorstanding loudspeakers, but it is doubtful that will happen in most homes that buy a Cara. The system would be ideally suited to a modern compact 5.1 sub sat system and that partnership would certainly clean up the bass congestion.

Switching back to *Avatar*, dialogue is good with accurate placement and smooth upper frequencies. Certainly no one is going to get any added sibilance, although I ended up manually setting the centre channel to 'small' (sending sub-100Hz output to the sub) to eliminate a chesty thickening in voices. The explosions as the Tree Home is destroyed are conveyed with convincing excitement and presence, but this is not a system to worry your foundations. The ultimate power is limited and the sound hardens quickly if you get enthused with the volume knob.

I do 'get' the Cara and its positioning, right down to the fact that it has a name rather than just a number. It's neat, simple to use and stylish, while performance-wise it dismisses the last B&O DVD system I tried a while back. So all in all it's a five-star winner. B&O would probably do it with greater panache, such as using motorised gizmos and a more innovative design. But for *HCC* readers, spend your two grand on Denon's own AVR-4310 receiver and DBP-2010 Blu-ray player and you would have video and particularly audio performance that comprehensively knocks the Cara into a cocked Jimmy Choo brogue. You pays your money and takes your choice and mine would be the separates every time



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: This receiver unit naturally uses more power than a typical BD spinner

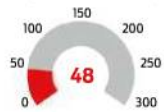


Powered: With everything driven, the Denon sucks over 400W

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

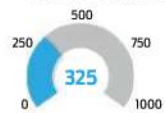


2-channel 8Ω: In two-channel mode. Our Tech Labs measured 56W into 8Ω.. Not a massive figure, but Denon only claims 75W into 4Ω



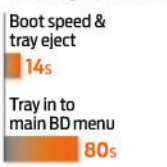
5-channel 8Ω: Multichannel performance suffers a bit of a drop off

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: A jitter figure of 325 picoseconds suggests a generally well-built machine

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Not as quick as many of its rivals, but still respectable



HCC VERDICT

Denon Cara S-5BD
Approx £2,000

Highs: Stylish, simple to use and offering class-leading performance
Lows: The class average is way below the performance of Denon's separates

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Ready to serve

Steve May smartens up his media with Netgear's ReadyNAS

AV/CV

Product: Multifunction NAS with a media support

Positioning: Part of a wide range of ReadyNAS NVX devices, which scale upwards to 8TB.

Peers: Iomega StorCenter IX2 NAS; LG N2B1 Blu-ray NAS

There's something reassuringly business-like about this machine. It has an aesthetic that shouts 'I'm small/home office and proud,' and it's weighty, too. With clean lines and impressive spec, it's a tempting plug-n-play solution for those that want both a competent media server and bullet-proof data storage with back.

Our review model is actually part of a five-strong line-up of lookalike models from the brand with capacities which range from 2TB to 8TB. The version tested is the RNDX4250, which ships with two 500GB drives and space for two more (four hot-swappable bays in all). Typical price is around £500.

The unit itself is reasonably quiet, if not whisper silent. In a living room environment it could be deemed rather intrusive. If you, like me, use a boot room to house your NAS, this is less of an issue. The good news is it stays cool. Even running constantly over a couple of months, power management seems excellent.

This ReadyNAS requires little real effort to install on a network. Control is via a straightforward web interface and a setup wizard holds your hand during the installation process.

As a media centre the NVX is accomplished. Out of the box, ReadyDNLA ensures playback of videos, music and snaps from DLNA/UPnP AV network media players and devices, and the unit was recognized by all devices when I placed it on my review network.

Naturally Netgear would like you to use it with its own EVA-branded media streamers, but it seems to work with everything. Play-out of 720p MKV files was smooth and stutter free; standard-def AVIs likewise. Streamed music retained all the integrity of the ripped files. As an AV system it's difficult to fault.

Functionality is good. There's a built-in Apple iTunes server, as well as support for other popular music distribution systems, such as the Logitech Squeezebox, Sonos and Roku SoundBridge. There's also an integrated Bittorent client, meaning you can download straight to the NAS without needing to keep PCs powered during the process.

Connectivity includes a trio of USBs (one front-mounted). This means USB print server sharing (turn any USB printer into a network printer) and provision for extra capacity expansion via external drives. There are two Gigabit Ethernet ports and a handy front-mounted LCD display which reveals its IP address and capacity usage.

The unit was run in Netgear's proprietary X-RAID2 mode, which means files are written to two drives as backup against a drive failure. There's also an integrated backup manager that enables one-button backup to an external USB drive.

Overall, I can't fault this NVX NAS. Aside from its dour demeanour and relatively high ticket price, it's fast, reliable and easy to use. And significantly, I never felt my sound and vision was in unreliable hands



→ Specifications

Features: Setup Wizard and browser-based interface; Windows MCE, ReadyDLNA, UPnP compatible; iTunes Server Volume support for RAID 0, 1, 5; Supported Network File Protocols: CIFS/SMB (Microsoft); AFP/Bonjour (Apple); NFS (Linux/UNIX), FTP, HTTP, WebDAV; Two 10/100/1000 Ethernet ports; integrated Backup Manager for full and incremental backups; backup to/from USB disks; external USB hard drive support for FAT32, Ext2, Ext3, and NTFS; Torrent download manager
Dimensions: 200(w) x 132(h) x 222(d)mm
Weight: 4.6kg (without disks)

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: Nothing to worry the polar bears here



In use: With 2 500GB drives installed, the ReadyNAS uses 40W when running



HCC VERDICT

Netgear ReadyNAS NVX RNDX4250
£500 Approx

Highs: Painless setup; integrated BitTorrent client; DNLA compliant; Logitech Squeezebox/Sonos/Roku SoundBridge device support; status LCD

Lows: A little noisy; SOHO-centric

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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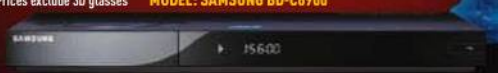
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AV/CV

Product:
5.1 THX array - made to be big on audio and look good, too

Positioning:
Mid-range amongst CA's THX-certified 5.1 setups

Peers:
Teufel System 5 THX Select; Monster THX Select



The black gloss finish adds a little style to this serious THX-certified array

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Cinematic talents steal the show

Adam Rayner gives Crystal Acoustics' THX system a workout with *Avatar*



At just over 10 years old, Crystal Acoustics is a relatively young company, but the career of its top honcho, Vassilis Tsakiris, as a respected loudspeaker designer and maker, spans three decades.

As per Teufel Lautsprecher and M&J subwoofers, Crystal is a direct seller that depends on its products looking attractive, while offering a generous five-year guarantee and a 60-day return policy to ensure potential buyers' confidence.

Our review set is the newest iteration of the company's THX product. Adhering to the Select and Ultra 2 specifications, they are made to perform in certain ways and, crucially, still look stylish. This is helped by the shiny, piano black, laminated surfaces in places such as the top of the subwoofer and the face of the towers. A posh, black Ash veneer is used for the rest.

The pair of TX-T2 towers have a brace of drivers and a tweeter, plus a centre that dares to be different and is endowed with one of the drivers that characterise the bigger towers. This is probably far less daring than it at first looks, since conventional speaker design dictates that the central enclosure is voiced equally to the left and rights, even if they are floorstanding. So, when you get a pair of six-inch drivers in a tower with a tweeter between them, the centre tends to have the same driver array, but simply hits slightly higher due to its smaller enclosed volume.

In this system's case, the two alluring drivers in the towers have quite different real estate. While they are both the same driver – each with a nice, fat-chromed phase plug protruding from the middle and a smooth-weave glass fibre cone – one has a small-ported cubic (just like the centre speaker) while the lower driver has another, bigger lump of cubic and its own dimpled fat-mouth port. In the towers, this gives a rich depth down to 35Hz, but far less bass in the centre with a bottom cut off at 45Hz.

You needn't worry about the bass end, though, as the system comes with a very bog-standard box, with an amplifier in one end and a woofer in the other. This THX-12SUB has a pair of big curvy-mouth ports on the same end as the amplifier's fins and you simply plug the LFE phono right in as mono. **It has only 200W of onboard power, which seems a lowish figure until you fire it all up and find it does fill the room.**

Having been designed to meet THX standards, the rears are Dipoles. This means they are not directed straight to your ears in those channels, but instead produce a diffused rear sonic field with sound effects emanating generally. This is done with push-pull tweeters sharing a midbass. You get the same 7in phase-plugged driver with an identical and attractive looking glass fibre cloth cone, and two high-frequency drivers that perform contrasting functions.

They fire along the side walls of your cinema room, with one going in while the other goes out, as it were. If they were to do the same thing and fire outwards along the wall in equal and opposite sound fields, the effect would be called Bipolar.

Going by the book

What it adds up to is a set that does what the boys at the THX company say it aughta do. Which is spread left and right by the correct amount, while keeping vertical directivity high, with less up and down dispersion to avoid ceiling and floor reflections, >

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Critical swivel: The 'frog-eye' tweeters are responsible for ensuring detail remains crisp

and to fill the room with enough boom to make explosions believable.

Some of this steering comes courtesy of the clever 'eyeballs' atop the speakers. These tweeter housings can be swivelled a few degrees in either direction to allow toe-in of the speakers and complete line-of-sight HF directivity for on-axis use. Their construction is critical, as any flexibility fore and aft in movement would allow for a smearing of the detail. In use, however, they were crisp and sweet.

I positioned the subwoofer and set it to what I know is a good crossover point for my room (a bit below the 80Hz and lower that pumps from my Pioneer LX-81's LFE feed) and played *Avatar* on Blu-ray.

Pandora's box

The planet Pandora is supposed to be richer and grander in scale than any other – and its jungle soundscapes must be all the grander – and this Crystal Acoustics system delivers an impact, realism and sheer scale that utterly belies its compact size.

The woven cones possess a snap and edgy detail that is comparable with the outrageously expensive carbon fibre ones used by Morel and the super-posh jobs made of Kevlar used by Bowers & Wilkins. The chaps at Crystal have cleverly designed a kicking drive unit that's far less costly.

But THX is not about economy; it is about it hitting the 'preferred listening curve'. When asked, people genuinely liked a steep slope of increasing high-frequency response to make it all 'tinkly' and a fat basso shelf of lifted low-end boom. This very concept is not about musicality, but rather movie excitement, so when you are engineering up to the edge to keep costs down, it is hard to make the speakers kind to music, too.

I noted, as *Avatar* started up, that the system has a vast dynamic and immense impact, and that **while I was worried that the tweeter mounts would be flimsy and muffled in output, they are in fact breath-takingly fast**, making tinkles and the edges of explosions come across on an epic scale. The midrange presentation was smooth with great intelligibility and definition, even in the midst of sonic mayhem. I loved the accuracy of the placement of the other-wordly creatures, and the Dipolar rears created a lovely spread of jungle to my sides and behind my head.

The depth of the soundfield was good too, with sounds placed near or far depending upon the stunning visuals, and I ran the system at a whopping zero dB reference level until it was a bit oppressive. On turning it down slightly, I found that the system was so specialised to do the Big Beastly THX Thing that it was not as linear or easy on the ear at lower levels. It likes to be driven hard.

I tried some multichannel music on it and while it was glossy and tinkly, it did lack a certain smooth fidelity that some much more costly speakers can bring to the party. You have to remember that the whole set costs £200 less than my B&W reference HTM3 centre speaker on its own, though. Without its stand.

This set offers bold, super-scaled output. Great fun comes as standard, as does a really clean and crisp sound field when it gets hectic. They're not ideal for picking out the third triangle on the left in the orchestra, but they are awesome for the prehistoric dragonfly buzzing behind your head. I'd give six out of five for VFM if I could

→Specifications

Crystal Acoustics TX-T2 Special Edition towers

Drive Units: 2 x 7in woven glass micro fibre bass drivers, each in separate differentially tuned ported enclosures within the tower; 1 x 1in top-mounted swivelling Neodymium magnet silk dome tweeter
Enclosure: 2-way dual front ported
Frequency Response: 35Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 91dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 150W
Dimensions: 200(w) x 1,011(h) x 300(d)mm
Weight: 19Kg

Crystal Acoustics THX-Centre

Drive Units: 1 x 7in woven glass micro fibre bass driver; 1 x 1in top-mounted, swivelling Neodymium magnet silk dome tweeter
Enclosure: 2-way front ported
Frequency Response: 45Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 550(w) x 215(h) x 162(d)mm
Weight: 7Kg

Crystal Acoustics THX-Dipoles

Drive Units: 1 x 7in glass fibre bass driver, 2 x 1in silk dome tweeters
Enclosure: Dipole – tweeter in each flank, midbass to fore
Frequency Response: 45Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 310(w) x 310(h) x 147(d)mm
Weight: 7Kg

Crystal Acoustics THX-12SUB

Drive Unit: 1 x 12in long throw paper cone woofer
Enclosure: Rear ported
Frequency Response: 19Hz-350Hz
On board power: 200W RMS Class A/B
Dimensions: 350(w) x 471(h) x 470(d)mm
Weight: 29Kg
Connections: Single phono input for mono LFE



HCC VERDICT

Crystal Acoustics TX-T2-12
Approx £1,200

Highs: Lovely full-range scale and power from small speakers; dual porting rocks!
Lows: Brash and unsubtle; they only really sing when pushed hard

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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No frills, just HD thrills

Adrian Justins ignores Sharp's blue meanie and focuses on the HD picture



Sharp has gone out on a limb by giving this Freeview HD receiver the rather unusual, and certainly unnecessary feature of eight bright blue LEDs arranged in a square on the fascia. It's hard to imagine anyone actually liking this distraction particularly as it can't be disabled.

This LED array mars what is otherwise an inoffensive design from a decent quality plastic slab. Another bum note, though, is the remote control, which looks like it's been shrunk in the wash with small, cramped buttons that are poorly labelled. At least the handset is well-built and the buttons respond nicely when pushed.

The connections, which are all round the back, hold no surprises with dual Scarts, an HDMI, digital optical audio, ethernet and USB complementing the RF loopthrough. The USB is solely for service use whilst the network port is on standby pending a possible upgrade to IP services in the future.

Installing the TUT2 couldn't be simpler. Assuming you're using an HDMI cable, the box simply scans in the channels, which takes about four minutes, and then you're watching BBC One. Picture resolution is set to upscale to 1080i by default but you can alter it to 1080p – not that you'll notice any difference if your screen already takes care of the maths.

There's a handy audio sync setting that adjusts the delay in 10ms increments, whilst the menu transparency option lets you choose between 0, 25, 50 and 75 per cent.

Some menu systems are so badly designed they practically need their own sat nav. Not here – this is one of the best Freeview menus around. Nothing fancy, just a winning combination of nice colours, decent legible fonts and logically laid out sub-menus that are quick and easy to move around.

The EPG isn't as versatile as some but it's by no means a dog. There's a small window showing the live feed and nine channels are shown in grid view with two hours' worth of shows on display. You can dance through in 2hr segments or jump 24hr. Native hi-def shows are labelled with a handy HD logo and reminders can be set as you go.

There's also a separate channel list (accessed by a dedicated button on the remote) that appears down the side of the screen and can be configured to show just favourite channels. This is an absolute necessity when the three HD channels (BBC, ITV, and C4) are buried down the EPG on channels 50, 51 and 52.

Picture quality is certainly up to snuff, with HD channels looking especially resplendent. Whatever anyone says about the BBC lowering its bitrate the results are still impressive compared with standard-def. Over on C4 HD the unflattering detail of Jeff Sterling's sweaty brow on *Countdown* is almost an argument against HD. As ever, the quality of standard-definition channels is at the mercy of the broadcaster.

Solid as a rock

It's light on additional features and has one slight design flaw, but Sharp's TUT2 delivers Freeview HD pictures with aplomb. Therefore, it may be just what you're looking for

AV/CV

Product: Vanilla-flavoured Freeview HD receiver

Positioning: Smaller brother to the 320GB-sporting TUT2HR32 PVR

Peers: Humax HD-Fox T2; Icecrypt T2200; Bush DVB680

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: Less than 1W consumption in standby



In use: With no HDD here, the TUT2 needs only 7W to function

Setup

Autoscanning of channels: 3m 43s

Disc loading & Java: Not as fast as Goodman's GDB300HD, but still quite speedy

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: NO
USB recording: NO
Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Upscaling: YES to 1080p
HDMI: YES
Component: NO
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES optical
Dimensions: 42(h) x 258(w) x 155(d)mm
Weight: 1.5kg
Also featuring: Dual Scart, 8-day EPG, ethernet port, USB service port

HCC VERDICT

Sharp TUT2
£180 Approx

Highs: Faultless Freeview HD pics; easy to operate; nice interface
Lows: Distracting LED array; cramped remote control; no networking

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

HD without HDMI

Martin Pipe tries a Full HD HDMI video sender

Here's the 21st Century equivalent of the wireless 'video senders' that proved quite popular in the last decade. And like these old analogue products, the iTRIO EM7100 will let you watch video playing out in one room on a TV located in another – over a range of 30metres, according to iTRIO. The EM7100 supports analogue sources and displays connected via component, Scart and VGA, but will also deal with HDMI. The technology behind the device? The manufacturer told us that the EM7100 is 'a combined 2.4/5GHz 802.11n wireless link'.

Highs

- This is easy to use. Plug the source into the transmitter and connect the receiver to the TV in the second room. The aerials are internal to the devices, and so nothing to fiddle with or worry about snapping off accidentally. A remote control switches between sources, if you've connected more than one.
- The HDMI port supports 1080p/24. 720p and 1080i are of course also supported, as are standard-definition resolutions. Up to two HDMI sources can be connected.
- Infra-red remote control 'repeater', so that you can remotely-operate your source equipment from the second room.
- I obtained reliable results within a 20metre range, in a house cluttered with RF-unfriendly junk...

Lows

- Uncompressed video is 'recompressed' using H.264 so that it can be conveyed over the radio links. iTrio says the data rate used is somewhere between 50 and 75Mbps. Some very slight compression artifacts are noticeable on occasions.
- Multichannel soundtracks aren't catered for. Regardless of how your source equipment has been configured, Dolby Digital and DTS formats (even the HD variants) are downmixed into two-channel 16-bit/48kHz PCM by the time they leave the receiver's HDMI port. Fine for TVs maybe, but a home-cinema no-no.
- The boxes run a little warm in use.

HCC VERDICT

iTRIO EM7100
£420 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5





Slender sender: Can be stood end-on to suit your needs

IOMEGA SCREENPLAY TV LINK → £90 Approx → http://go.iomega.com

Media player burns bright

Iomega's media player should turn heads, says **Steve May**

Aimed squarely at the rapidly growing media streaming market, currently dominated by Western Digital's WDTV line, Iomega's diminutive TV Link is an attractive proposition. Aside from its advanced media playback facilities, it offers access to some useful online content and is beautifully made.

On its slim rear there's a USB port, phono AV outputs, Ethernet, optical digital audio out, HDMI and input for the external power brick. Frontside, there's an additional pair of USB inputs. A chunky remote is also thrown into the bargain.

Setup is straightforward, although the logic of the directional remote takes a little getting used to. Using the wired connection is the best way to get the unit networked, although Iomega does sell a wi-fi dongle.

Highs

- Build quality is excellent; the TV Link turns its high-end nose up at low-cost plastics.
- Online content access is solid. You can search and play You Tube fullscreen on your TV, browse photo albums on Flickr, stream your favourite 'net radio stations and set up RSS feeds, and even manage torrent downloads.
- Most file extensions/containers are supported, including AVI, XviD, WMV, AVCHD and MKV; audio support covers MP3, WAV, OGG, WMA and FLAC. For more, go to the Iomega site.
- Media plays both locally and over the network. UPnP/DNLA compliance ensures that the TV Link can find networked NAS and PC sources.

Lows

- I did find files which befuddled the Iomega. A DVD AVI rip which was played via a rival streamer and a TV with media playback facilities, just hung on the TV Link. Inconsistencies like this are not unexpected and will probably be ironed out with future firmware releases..
- The lack of any usable search function is a pain. To find specific artists or albums in a large collection you have to trawl through the list.

HCC VERDICT

Iomega Screenplay TV Link Director's Edition
£90 Approx

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5



In Brief

ModNation Racers: (PS3)
Sony Computer Entertainment
£50 approx



PS3-owners after some *Mario Kart*-style arcade racing will get a real kick out of this great-looking, frantically paced multiplayer drive-'em-up. What really makes it stand out, though, is the very intuitive and comprehensive track editing kit, allowing you to share your creations online

1 2 3 **4** 5

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

HDMI into analogue will go

Martin Pipe upgrades his old AV receiver for HDMI audio



Multichannel analogue audio outputs are sometimes absent from Blu-ray players (as indeed are the corresponding inputs of amplifiers and receivers), with manufacturers assuming you're using HDMI throughout. But what if the AV powerhouse at the heart of your system lacks HDMI? You could consider Octava's HDSA71, a useful gizmo which will decode multichannel tracks (up to 7.1) and present them in analogue form to a series of phono connectors. It also acts as a 4-in/2-out HDMI switcher.

Highs

- This unit staves off obsolescence – who said AV enthusiasts couldn't be 'green'? Within the confines of the compatible signal formats, the HDSA71 sounded pretty creditworthy when it was fed into the multichannel input of our AV 'guinea-pig'.
- An 'auxiliary' 7.1 input, which takes the form of a second bank of phono sockets, ensures that the musically-inclined can continue to enjoy DVD-As and/or SACDs.
- The HDSA71 can be operated with a handy remote handset, or via RS232. System integrators will appreciate the latter. SmartScan technology automatically-identifies active HDMI inputs.

Lows

- The cost of this unit, plus whatever you get from selling your existing amp/receiver, could buy a new unit that builds in the HDMI switcher – and gives you high-res audio decoding too.
- 16bit 44.1/48kHz uncompressed PCM is the only format handled by the HDSA71 – it has no truck with 'regular' flavours of Dolby Digital or DTS, never mind their high-res successors. You'll need to configure the HDMI audio options of your Blu-ray player accordingly.
- Our sample was initially faulty – the problem was eventually traced to a faulty solder joint. We sincerely hope you're luckier...

AV life saver: Octava's unit is the bridge between an HDMI-only BD deck and an analogue AVR

HCC VERDICT
Octava HDSA71
£270 Approx
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

PANASONIC DMR-EZ49V → £275 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk

Combination cost-cutter

Jim Hill dubs his dusty VHS tapes to DVD

VHS fuelled the furnaces of Japan's economic miracle, so perhaps that's why Panasonic and Toshiba seem reluctant to stop making them. Clearly there's demand and we can see how this DVD hybrid could prove a useful evolutionary stepping stone for late adopters.

With a Freeview tuner built in and fast dubbing between tape and DVD, it serves as a useful TV recorder and a cost-effective preserver of your precious tapes. However, without a hard drive to edit down on, or a second tuner for dual recording, it won't suit those that really love to time shift. And without Blu-ray playback, or a Freeview HD tuner, you're also stuck with standard-def, making this a niche product.

Highs

- Playback of both formats is solid, with the analogue portion delivering fairly steady video up to (but not including) S-VHS quality, and the digital portion showing relatively noise-free DVD pictures. Both sources can be upscaled very well to 720p resolution. You can output at 1080p if you're prepared to stretch the onboard video scaler and overlook the occasional picture judder.
- The DVD recorder element is bang up to date and compatible with all of the recordable formats, including double-layer discs. That means you can use DVD-RAM blanks and take advantage of their additional editing features.

Lows

- The clunky cassette mechanism makes this machine big and heavy – and quite noisy when it's winding tape, too.
- I still think Panasonic's GUI could be more streamlined, but it has been improved from last year to include a handy Direct Navigator shortcut to quickly choose your source.



HCC VERDICT
Panasonic DMR-EZ49V
£275 Approx
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

In Brief

Split/Second: Velocity (Xbox 360)
Disney Interactive
£50 approx



Mixing together *Ridge Racer* and *Death Race*, what this electrifying racer lacks in depth it makes up for with explosive spectacle as you wreak Michael Bay-style havoc on your opponents. Extra points for to including a split-screen multiplayer options as well as online battles

1 2 3 4 5

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Competition

WIN! A fantastic Portland TV stand and home cinema shelving unit worth £230 from Peerless!



SIX PRIZES TO WIN! Enter online now

What good is it having a beautiful flatscreen TV if you have nothing to put it on? Now you could solve your no-AV-furniture dilemmas with this fantastic competition, where we have SIX Peerless Portland AV units, worth £230 each, to give away to lucky readers!



AV accessories specialist, Peerless, has recently launched the Portland TV stand range, which boasts an elegant curved walnut-effect finish. The chic design combines the aesthetic beauty of rounded side panels and curved-fronted, toughened piano-black glass shelves, with the practicality of an angled rear profile that's ideal for fitting either flat against a wall or into a corner.

The walnut-finish side panels have been specially selected to not only blend seamlessly with the gloss-black glass shelves, but also to complement the widest range of both modern and traditional interiors, creating a piece of furniture that looks stunning, while supporting the latest generation of flat-panel LCD, LED or plasma screens. An adjustable middle shelf allows for the largest of AV amplifiers.

The designs utilise safety-standard-approved toughened glass, are easy to assemble and have been built using the finest construction techniques.

You can find out more about the range at **www.bbg.eu.com**. All you have to do to enter our competition is to visit the website at **www.futurecomps.co.uk/peerless** and answer the following brainteaser:

Question: Portland is a famous type of what?
A: Stone
B: Carpet
C: Donkey

Six lucky winners will be chosen at random from the correct entries. The closing date is 31 August. Full terms and conditions are below.

The small print: By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futureTCS.com. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

IL DIVO

Approx £250

TV speakers are about as acoustically satisfying as a public address announcement on the Tube. A number of options exist for upgrading audio when watching TV, however, including soundbars, surround sound systems and 2.1 units such as Ixos's Divo. This £250 multi-purpose system is designed to work with TVs and iPods (isn't everything these days?), but can also sync content with iTunes on your Mac or PC.

The Divo boasts a total power output a shade less than 50W and comprises micro-tower stereo speakers, an active subwoofer, iPod dock and all manner of cables and interconnects. The system's 3.5mm input are compatible with most audio sources such as CD players, games consoles and laptops.

www.ixos.co.uk/divo



HCC VERDICT
Ideal audio enhancer



SANUS MOUNTS

From £55

Thin is definitely in. But sticking a flat TV up on a wall to show off its narrow profile can be problematic, as conventional wall mounts cause most LED-lit screens to stick out. The world's largest maker of screen mounts, Sanus, has addressed this with its Super Slim series of mounts.

The Vision Mount £55 ML11 and £70 LL11 mounts, for panels ranging in size from 26in - 46in and 37in - 65in respectively, position the rear of the panel just 14mm from the wall.

Sanus uses ClickStand to simplify access to the cable connections, whilst ProSet allows post-installation fine-tuning of height and level for perfect positioning.

www.sanus.com/eu/en/

HCC VERDICT
Slim set saviour

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome



GOING APE

From £36

A new name in the cable jungle has arrived in the form of British startup, Monkey Cable. The company has introduced a selection of high quality HDMI cables in various lengths ranging from £36 for a 1m Concept lead to £183 for 5m of the flagship Connoisseur. The simian brand doesn't monkey about; it plans to unveil further connection solutions such as interconnects, speaker cables and digital splitters and switchers.
www.monkeycable.com

HCC VERDICT
Affordable quality

ONE FOR ALL
SMART CONTROL

Approx £25

The universal remote specialist claims its SmartControl handset is the first pre-programmed model for under £25 that is compatible with just about every digital media device going. Press 'Watch Movie' , for example, and you can control your TV's volume, as well as the movie functions of your Blu-ray deck and AVR at the same time. The SimpleSet feature sets up most popular brands, when registering the remote with your equipment.
www.oneforall.com/smartcontrol

HCC VERDICT
Smart and simple





VITA AUDIO
R1 + ACCESSORIES

From £160

DAB has its critics, but like it or loathe it, the UK will lose its analogue radio signal before long. Anyone looking to invest in a portable digital radio may be enticed by Vita Audio's upgraded R1 model. With a strong pedigree in the DAB arena, Vita Audio has not only bestowed a number of audio circuit enhancements on the R1 and increased its power output, but it has also given it an optional rechargeable power pack. Dubbed BackPack, the £50 NiMH battery fixes on to the back panel of the new R1 and can be charged in situ during indoor listening.

A hand stitched leather case called a CarryPack has also been launched, priced at £40. This is designed to make it easier and safer to transport the radio.
www.vitaaudio.com

HCC VERDICT
Stylish soundbox

Clips...

Small items that will make a big difference to your system

Clean machine



ISOL-8's VMC1080
£189
Noise pollution doesn't just affect your ears, it's a problem for video displays, too. Power noise caused by electronic interference can seep into your home cinema system and diminish the picture quality. But a solution is at hand in the guise of a mains conditioner such as ISOL-8's VMC1080.
www.isol-8.co.uk

iPad cinema app

Meridian Sooloos
£Free



One of the first free iPad apps for home cinema use is for Meridian's Sooloos, which provides full control of the Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System. The app finds your wi-fi network, locates the Sooloos Digital Media System, and connects to it automatically with no configuration necessary. Once connected, you can browse your music and control all aspects of playback in multiple system zones. The application is free for download from the iTunes website .
www.meridian-audio.com

Blu-ray on the hoof

Plextor PX-B120U
£TBC



For people who can't go a moment without viewing a high-definition disc, Plextor has launched the PX-B120U external Blu-ray drive. This portable drive can be connected to a media player and used as a living room Blu-ray disc player, but is versatile enough to carry in a notebook bag or connect to a desktop PC.
www.plextor.com

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome



Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Free and easy HD

At last the first crop of eagerly-awaited Freeview+ HD PVRs have appeared on sale. **Adrian Justins** dusts down his HD chaff filter



SAGEMCOM
RT190-320 T2 HD
£250 Approx
Sagem, renamed Sagemcom is taking a new approach to design. This 320GB box also offers some neat editing tricks

DIGITALSTREAM
DHR8205U
£300 Approx
A no-nonsense looking unit, boasting a 500GB hard drive and a versatile operating system

PHILIPS
HDT 8520
£300 Approx
A 500GB HD recorder designed by Pace and dipped in a Freeview vat by Philips. Small and stylish

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

You can't imagine Sky making an HD box that had no built-in recorder, because with no means of time-shifting HD shows, it wouldn't be viable. Similarly, if you want to record a Freeview HD show, a PVR is essential, as a Freeview HD TV or receiver will only let you to record in SD (with a DVD recorder or PVR).

When Freeview HD boxes first hit the airwaves, terrestrial TV viewers rushed to buy them, partly so they could watch the World Cup in HD clarity. PVRs take longer to develop and produce, and the first boxes only started to appear when the tournament was already under way.

This selection is the first trio of models to go on sale and none of them are based on existing Freeview+ models. They have all been designed and built from scratch, and have little excuse should they fall short of the high standards set by other hi-def PVRs from the major players, Sky and Virgin Media.

Design

Despite the burden of an internal hard disk and additional electronics, these boxes have similar proportions to regular Freeview HD receivers and can easily be accommodated on an AV rack, cabinet or shelf.

The Sagemcom is as small as a paperback and is made from sturdy lightweight plastic. The rectangular design and shiny black fascia are a welcome departure from the diminutive, grey boxes favoured by Sagem, the former incarnation of this French electronics giant. The fascia is bestowed with controls for changing channels around a power button and its clean look is mired by a USB service-only port. When switched on, the four-digit LED display shows the channel number, which is fine but it looks rather primitive when showing words such as NEnu (for menu), 6u1d (for guide) and init when initialising.

It's also a pity that Sagemcom has implemented an onscreen menu system that looks about a decade out of date. The drab grey and red colour mix, old-fashioned fonts and clipart-style icons combine to generate a distinctly blunt rather than cutting edge feel. Worse still, navigating the menu system is so slow that the box's delayed reactions can mean that you end up in totally the wrong place.

More positively, the 8-day EPG is nicely laid out, with a small window showing the current broadcast and is the most versatile of the three boxes. Information of each show is plentiful apart from the lack of native resolution. You can zoom in or out to show one, two or four hours ahead in list or grid view, plus there's day and date selection. When recording, the LED display always shows 'rec', losing the usual channel number reference.

DESIGN

Round-up: The Philips is stylish and well-built on the outside with a (mostly) user-friendly menu system on the inside. The Sagemcom is pleasant enough to look at, but its operating system looks ancient and is woefully slow. Aesthetically, the Digitalstream is old-fashioned, but it has a CI slot and boasts a contemporary operating system that's good to use

Digitalstream DHR8205U: 1 2 3 4 5
Philips HDT8520: 1 2 3 4 5
Sagemcom RT190-320: 1 2 3 4 5

SAGEMCOM RT190-320 T2 HD → £250 Approx → www.sagemcomdigital.co.uk



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: No eco-worries here



In use: About as much as a regular BD deck

Setup:

Autoscanning of channels
2m 58sec

Tuning: The unit zips though this stage

Selling for around £50 less than the other two boxes as it only carries a 320GB hard disk, the Sagemcom is the first receiver from the reborn French company to depart from the squat, grey design synonymous with the Sagem name. The result is appealing, but the innards are a disappointment. The menu system's dated look can be put down to poor taste, but the sluggish way it reacts is hard to forgive. On the plus side, the EPG works well, the info banner scrolls through the channels and the performance of the tuners and PVR is hard to fault.

Scrubs up well: Combines operation with a more tempting external appearance than before

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Aesthetically, the Philips box is a cut above the others, with an almost square footprint and finished in high quality plastic. Bizarrely, two of the fascia's five buttons are for selecting the resolution (576i, 576p, 1080i or 1080p) and video output (Scart or HDMI). The 16-digit alphanumeric display has a professional feel about it and is a useful visual aid. The single USB slot, positioned just out of view on the left side, is a nice touch.

The most unusual feature about the box is the white light that runs around the top edge. Its gimmicky default setting comes on as you power up and down, but it can be left on whenever the box is on, too.

The menu system is mostly a pleasure to use, if perhaps a bit drab with no fancy icons and very ordinary fonts, but it's a cinch to install and navigate. The main complaint is that the EPG takes you right out of the current broadcast; there's no overlaying or even background sound. The Digitalstream's EPG has no window, but does adopt the overlaid approach with audio maintained. A shame then that you can't adjust the translucency and can barely see what's happening anyway. The box itself is an inoffensive, somewhat dull slab that's more in keeping with the dimensions of a typical Blu-ray deck. The Digitalstream's attractive menu system could have been pinched from Samsung, with six contemporary icons on the main page, a logical layout and slick interface. It also has a rather useful Function+ button that offers shortcuts via a pop-up screen, depending what menu you're in. Simple but clever. Also useful is that the info banner tells you if anything is being recorded by the two tuners.

Of the remote controls, the Philips is streets ahead of the other two, being nicely laid out and comfortable. The Sagemcom's isn't too bad, but several button or labels are too small. The Digitalstream is the worst with tiny, cramped buttons that you practically need a magnifying glass to identify in low light.

FEATURES

Round-up: The Digitalstream offers PIP plus JPEG and MP3 file playback (via USB). It can sometimes record two channels while showing a third. The Sagecom lets you combine recordings and re-folder them

Digitalstream DHR8205U: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Philips HDT8520: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sagemcom RT190-320: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Features

The Digitalstream box is the only one that offers picture-in-picture during broadcasts and is the only one capable of playing additional media as none of the boxes' ethernet ports are (currently) active. The Digitalstream's front panel hides a CI slot and USB port which respectively offer access to Top Up TV and JPEG/MP3 file playback.

All the boxes claim to have Dolby Digital decoding (Philips even has both coaxial and optical ports) but none actually outputs surround sound because they cannot transcode AAC to DD 5.1 or Dolby Digital Plus (AAC is used to carry audio descriptions).

All the boxes upscale to 1080p and have the usual raft of PVR functions including live pause, but only the Sagemcom boasts a

DIGITALSTREAM DHR8205U → £300 Approx → www.dstreamtech.com



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: With 'power saving in standby' mode on



In use: Quite energy-hungry for a PVR

Setup:

Autoscanning of channels: 4m 40sec

Tuning: Not the quickest STB around

Digitalstream is a little known Korean manufacturer that has been clearly influenced by its mighty compatriot Samsung when it comes to the menu system, if not the entire external aspect of the box.

With a 500GB hard drive and twin tuners, plus a clever feature that enables you to watch a third channel while recording two (dependent on multiplexing), a CI slot and picture-in-picture this is a more versatile box than its rivals. Other appealing features include good quality information in the onscreen banner (but only now and next) and the ability to bookmark recordings.

Over and above: Offers more recording flexibility than the other contenders

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

blistering 300x fast forward mode and can combine recordings and place them in folders. The Digitalstream will uniquely let you record two channels and watch a third, if per chance two channels are sharing one tuner. But it's a random process and can't be relied on.

The Philip's EPG rigidly shows only three hour blocks for eight channels but long titles scroll and you can shimmy along quite quickly. Strangely, you can set the recorder within the EPG but can't change channels. This can only be done via the that offers picture-in-picture during broadcasts and is capable of playing additional media, as none of the boxes' Ethernet ports are (currently) active. The Digitalstream's front panel discreetly hides a CI slot and USB port, which respectively provide access to Top Up TV and JPEG/MP3 file playback.

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The Philip's EPG rigidly shows only three hour blocks for eight channels, but long titles scroll along quite quickly. Strangely, you can set the recorder within the EPG, but can't change channels. This can only be done via the channel list, which is called up in conventional fashion by pushing the okay button. Most odd.

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: The Sagemcom records excellent HD images, but is slow. The Philips is a good all-rounder and the Digitalstream performs well with HD, but not SD. All three lack Dolby Digital audio.

Digitalstream DHR8205U: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Philips HDT8520: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sagemcom RT190-320: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Performance

All three boxes output excellent HD pictures (assuming your signal is good enough) that are a match for any TV's built-in Freeview HD tuner and Sky HD. Despite operational quirks (the Digitalstream labels recordings with computer-like file names) there is little difference in the recording capabilities, as all of them suffer from slight jerkiness or picture freezing when driven too hard, but then Sky boxes have always crashed.

The biggest difference I found was with the standard-def tuners. The Philips and Sagemcom are about as good as anything else on the Freeview HD market with quality very much dependent on the broadcaster's bitrate, but the Digitalstream is distinctly below par with pictures that look as if vaseline has been smeared over the screen. Altering the video output to 576, 720 or 1080 lines makes no difference.

PHILIPS HDT 8520 → £300 Approx → www.philips.co.uk



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: The box still uses a few Watts when in standby



In use: But it's quite respectable when running

Setup:



Tuning: Not too long a wait to get going

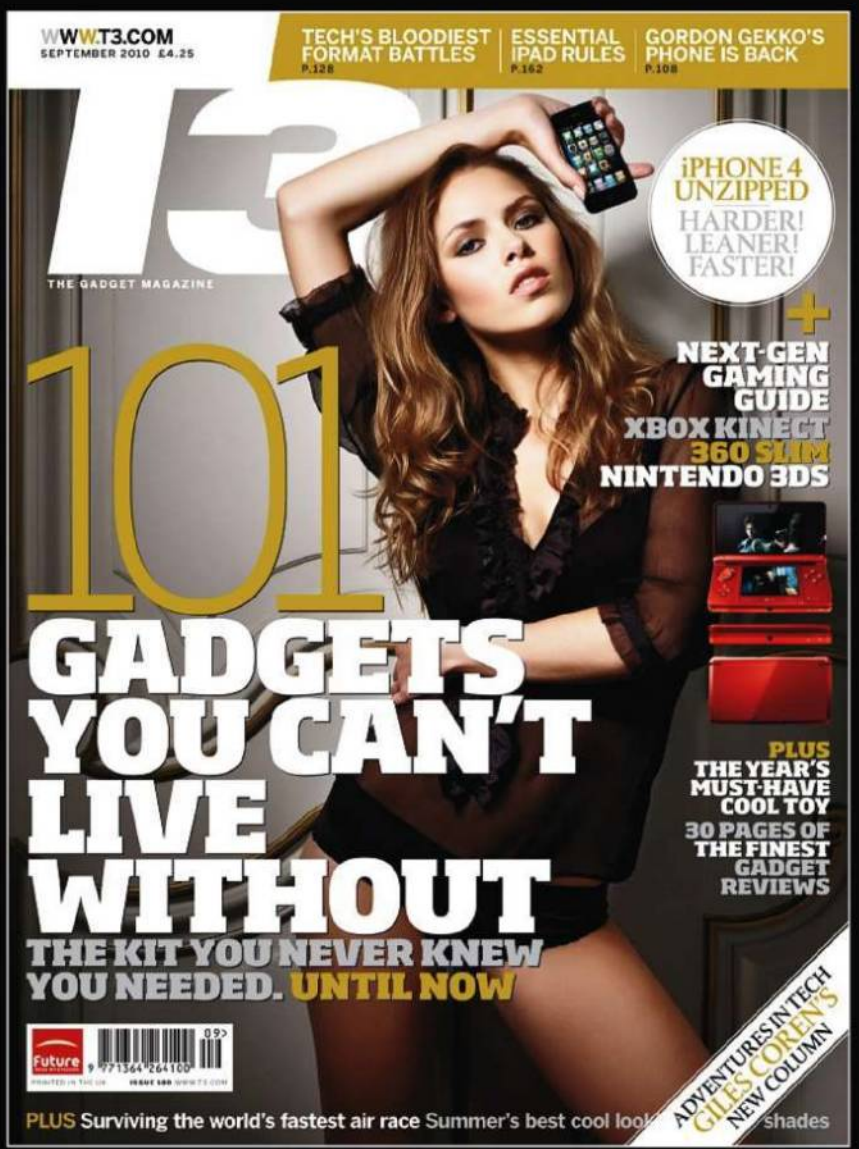
You won't find a better looking Freeview+ HD box than this 500GB PVR, which has been designed by British set-top box specialist, Pace. The specification is a little lacklustre; there's no networking, multimedia playback or CI slot, and the menu system wouldn't really cut it on the Freeview catwalk, with a cul-de-sac of an EPG that exits the live broadcast entirely and won't let you go to another channel. Otherwise, it's simple to use and, most importantly of all, image and sound quality of both live transmissions and recordings is excellent.

Plain Jane: Simplicity itself to use with sterling all-round performance

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T3

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Final standings



It's undeniably good news that the HD genie has finally escaped from the Freeview bottle, but this first wave of terrestrial HD PVRs just isn't as bedazzling as we hoped it would be (none, for example, outputs Dolby Digital).

However, if you're in a tearing hurry to bag yourself a free-to-air HD recorder, any of these boxes will deliver the HD goods. They are expensive compared with non-HD PVRs, but these are still early days.

In third place is the Sagemcom, which is a decent looking box with a really helpful EPG, but severely disappoints with its outdated menus and tiresomely slow operating system. Sagemcom is improving matters with over-the-air updates but it's yet to reach an acceptable point.

Second position goes to the Digitalstream box. This is the most versatile box, being the only one to offer a CI slot, PIP, bookmarking and multi-media playback. It also boasts the slickest menu system, but is severely hampered by a cramped remote control and poor, standard-def tuner.

Despite an annoying EPG, the Philips scoops top slot for its all-round solid performance, unmatched user-friendliness, good remote control and appealing design

1st



HCC VERDICT

Philips HDT 8520
£300 Approx

Highs: Good quality HD and SD pics; cutting-edge looks; friendly user interface

Lows: EPG frustrations; no DD; no multi-media functions

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: YES 500GB (110hr HD capacity)
DVB tuner: YES 2 x DVB-T2
HDMI: YES 1 upscaling to 1080p
Component video out: NO
Stereo phono output: YES
Digital audio output: YES optical and electrical
Dimensions: 240(w) x 210(d) x 65(h)mm
Weight: 1.75kg
Also featuring: EPG Series Link; Ethernet; 2 USB; Scart; manual recording; antenna powering; eco mode; automatic time shift; Instant replay; lip sync adjust

2nd



HCC VERDICT

Digitalstream DHR8205U
£300 Approx

Highs: Build quality; user interface; CI slot; plays JPEGs and MPEGs

Lows: Below-par SD pics; no media streaming

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: YES 500GB (120hr HD capacity)
DVB tuner: YES 2 x DVB-T2
HDMI: YES 1 upscaling to 1080p
Component video out: NO
Stereo phono output: YES
Digital audio output: YES Optical
Dimensions: 360(w) x 265(d) x 60(h)mm
Weight: 3.1kg
Also featuring: CI slot; EPG Series Link; Instant replay; Quick Skip; manual recording; automatic time shift; Power saving mode; Bookmarking; Picture-in Picture; Ethernet; 2 USB, JPEG and MP3 playback; Scart; composite video out

3rd



HCC VERDICT

Sagemcom RT190-320 T2 HD
£250 Approx

Highs: Good quality HD and SD pics; can combine recordings; picture window in EPG

Lows: Antediluvian UI; sluggish menu system; ugly LED display

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: YES 320GB (80hr HD capacity)
DVB tuner: YES 2 x DVB-T2
HDMI: YES 1 upscaling to 1080p
Component video out: NO
Stereo phono output: YES
Digital audio output: YES Electrical
Dimensions: 260(w) x 160(d) x 48(h)mm
Weight: 0.8 kg
Also featuring: EPG Series Link; Ethernet; USB; Scart; automatic time shift; instant replay;manual recording; folder management; recording combining

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PLAYBACK

→Software highlights **SOLOMON KANE** Cult sword and sorcery capers on BD **SHUTTER ISLAND** Scorsese goes mental **THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG** Disney returns to its hand-drawn roots **LEGION** Look what happens when an angel goes 'rogue'! **GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO** Best-selling book brought to the big screen **AND MUCH MORE!**

All's Wells...

War of the Worlds → All-Region Blu-ray

But does it end well? Spielberg's explosive remake of HG Wells' Martian invasion story gets scrutinised under a bright light on page 89. Would the author approve and how do our critics rate the 5.1 DTS-HD MA soundtrack?



HCC Ratings key

Life on Mars	1 2 3 4 5
Mars Attacks!	1 2 3 4 5
Mars bar	1 2 3 4 5
Johnny Mars	1 2 3 4 5
Ghosts of Mars	1 2 3 4 5

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Ferry story: this time DiCaprio stays afloat



Isle of Fright festival

Scorsese's locked room mystery plugs in the shock treatment in this synapse-frying tale





HCC VERDICT

Shutter Island → Paramount → All-region BD → £27 Approx

We say: This provocative thriller gets a technically stunning disc, only let down by its paucity of extra features

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

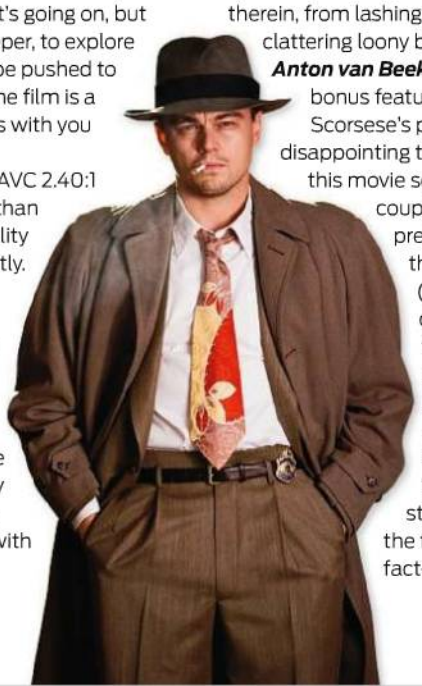
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Shutter Island may not be vintage Scorsese, but like its predecessor, *Cape Fear*, it finds the master filmmaker using genre conventions to explore some challenging themes and ideas. When a patient goes missing from a centre for the criminally insane, located off the coast of Massachusetts, US Marshall Teddy Daniels (a captivating Leonardo DiCaprio) arrives to investigate. What he finds is a complex web of lies and despair that will either frustrate or delight depending on how you engage with it. On the surface, it's easy to guess what's going on, but Scorsese wants you to dig deeper, to explore the depths that a person can be pushed to by tragedy, and on that front the film is a tremendous success and stays with you long after the end credits roll.

Mark Craven: *Shutter Island*'s AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is nothing less than astonishing, capturing the duality of the film's visual style perfectly. Brighter daytime scenes are bursting with colour and excellent clarity, while gloomy interiors are packed with rock-solid blacks and perfect contrast levels. Fine object detail is particularly impressive throughout the film, with every clothing texture, facial wrinkle and strand of hair picked out with incredible sharpness.

Steve May: Overwrought to an almost hysterical degree, *Shutter Island*'s DTS-HD 5.1 MA mix is as thick and black as Scorsese's trademark spectacles. Most of the soundtrack seems to exist below 100Hz, honking and mugging for all its worth. When DiCaprio first walks up to the gates of Ben Kingsley's home for the mentally scrambled, the score furiously works itself into a cathartic lather to forewarn the audience of the grim perils to come. (I found it hard not to laugh). The surround stage is used to rather good effect therein, from lashing rain and crashing trees, to clattering loony bin ambiance.

Anton van Beek: Considering the quality of bonus features that have accompanied Scorsese's previous films, it's pretty disappointing to learn that the Blu-ray of this movie serves up nothing more than a couple of featurettes. They're both pretty substantial pieces, though: *Behind the Shutters* (17mins) talks to the cast, director and actor about the film's themes and preparing the roles, while *Inside the Lighthouse* (21mins) takes a deeper look at the film's construction and psychiatric 'care' in the 1950s. But they still leave you wanting one of the filmmaker's customary fact-packed audio commentaries.



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Youth in Revolt

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx



A shy, put-upon guy discovers the girl of his dreams, but does he have what it takes to win her over? While it sounds like pretty much every other Michael Cera film to date, if you stick with this smarter-than-average teen comedy it reveals a darker edge. This time Cera's character invents a moustachioed, French alter ego in an effort to express his more outrageous urges. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p imagery is natural looking and is rock solid throughout, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 is pleasingly atmospheric. A relaxed commentary, nine deleted scenes are among the extras. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The Bounty Hunter

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£23 Approx



This action-comedy could have been a real winner, thanks to its excellent cast (Jennifer Aniston, Gerard Butler, Jeff Garlin) and *Midnight Run*-inspired plot. Unfortunately, what we've ended up with is just too slight, breezy and uninvolving to really recommend for anything other than a Sunday afternoon.

Sony Pictures' Blu-ray is similarly unremarkable. The 2.35:1 AVC encode is detailed and vibrant but not without its flaws, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is almost totally forgettable, and the three short bonus featurettes are EPK-style fluff – which is exactly what I expected. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

From Paris with Love

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£23 Approx



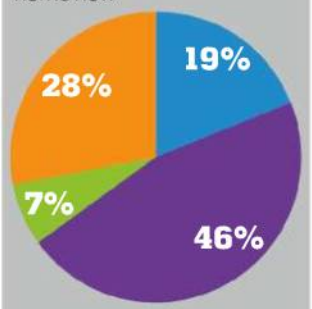
Producer Luc Besson and director Pierre Morel struck cinema gold with their violent romp, *Taken*, so this action-comedy raises expectations. It stars Jonathan Rhys Myers as a low-level CIA agent, who finds himself with an unorthodox partner (John Travolta, clearly having a ball chewing the scenery). But the comedy never sparks and the action is surprisingly sparse. On a positive note, the VC-1 2.35:1 1080p encode is very strong, with plenty of detail and vibrant colours, while the Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix is punchy enough for the action. ***AvB***

1 **2** 3 4 5

Your views...

Do you still regularly go to the cinema to watch films?

- Yes, I go as often as possible
- Not really, only for 'event' films, or with friends
- Only to watch 3D films
- Never, I only watch films at home now



Results of poll from www.homecinemachoice.com

Invasion of the killer tripods

Spielberg's take on the steampunk epic looks suitably gritty and knocks spots off the DVD

War of the Worlds Spielberg's sci-fi disaster movie barely puts a foot wrong for its first two acts, mixing stunning spectacle and incredible special effects with the kind of rich characterisation and intelligent storytelling that is so often forgotten by other filmmakers working in the genre. But towards the end, it all starts to fall apart: Tom Cruise's everyman character suddenly becomes an unbelievable action hero, Hollywood schmaltz raises its ugly head, and a close adherence to the ending of HG Wells' original novel feels oddly anti-climactic. While it's not a bad film by any means, you can't help feeling that it could, nay should, have been so much better.

Mark Craven: For a mega-budget sci-fi blockbuster, the movie doesn't deliver the kind of hi-def eye candy you may be expecting. Working with his frequent collaborator, cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, Spielberg gives the film a deliberately gritty aesthetic, full of heavy grain, washed out colours and blooming whites. Most significantly, though, unlike the rather mushy-looking old DVD release, this Blu-ray's AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode preserves the look of the movie flawlessly and with great aplomb.

Steve May: Hold onto your wigs and keys, this flawless 5.1 DTS HD MA soundtrack will take you on a wild ride. Long time Spielberg collaborator, John Williams, whips up an inventive, pulsing, panicky soundtrack, which mixes choirs with electronic riffs and the accompanying sound editing is breathtaking. The arrival of the aliens, heralded by rapid-fire LFE lightning bolts that startle and cause car alarms to ring in the centre back channel, is simply stunning. The ensuing attack is a thrilling, terrifying sonic assault, in which windows shatter, buildings crumble and people evaporate into dust as the orchestra crescendos. And that's just the first act...

Anton van Beek: All of the bonus material from the old two-disc DVD has been squeezed onto this single-Blu-ray release. Which means, in addition to the trailer mentioned above, there are also eight behind-the-scenes featurettes, four lengthy production diaries and four art and photo galleries to while away several hours of your life. >



The only Surrey garden that doesn't have a water feature



HCC VERDICT

War of the Worlds
Paramount → All-region
BD → £20 Approx

We say: The film might have its problems, but the Blu-ray's AV quality is out of this world

Picture: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Spawn again fairytale is set to charm

This Afro/American-angled remake sees Disney return to hand-drawn animation

The Princess and the Frog carries a lot of responsibility. After the 2004 release of the disappointing *Home on the Range*, Disney announced that it would be ceasing production of traditional 2D animation and focusing solely on 3D CG features. Thankfully, the company eventually saw the light and decided to go ahead with this traditionally animated version of *The Frog Prince*. While it doesn't quite measure up to the company's very best, this hand-drawn film should delight fans of all ages with its lively and exciting New Orleans–set story of a feckless Prince and workaholic young woman transformed into frogs by an evil voodoo priest.

Mark Craven: If ever you wanted a perfect example of how incredible 2D animation looks in hi-def, then this is the disc for you. Encoded in AVC at the original 1.78:1 aspect ratio, the 1080p imagery is simply gorgeous. An explosion of vibrant colours that practically leaps out of the screen, it never looks anything less than flawless, no matter how elaborate the song and dance sequences get, and there's none of the banding issues or edge enhancement that sometimes blight animated material on Blu-ray. As Disney is so fond of saying, this Blu-ray encode of *The Princess and the Frog* is nothing less than magical.





Steve May: Bristling with bonhomie, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack of this delightfully retro Disney escapade will have you grinning from ear to ear. As smooth as an amphibian in a tux, it skilfully mixes the jazzy strains of classic New Orleans with character-rich vocal work, to create a sound mix as tasty as a lightly sugar-dusted beignet.

The Randy Newman score is pitch perfect (though I must confess that this Pixar-regular will never be my preferred cup of Joe), and the BD presentation technically flawless. Audio design is artful and subdued, with the rear channels used primarily for ambiance, but the stage blooms with the musical numbers.

Anton van Beek: Disney marks its return to traditional 2D animation with an extremely handsome collection of bonus material. Making the most of the format, the big treat for animation fans is the inclusion of a Work in Progress picture-in-picture track, which showcases early artwork, storyboards and animations. Just as satisfying is the fascinating audio commentary from the film's co-writers/directors John Musker and Ron Clements, and producer Peter Del Vecho, which looks at the making of the film in great detail. Following on from this you get four deleted scenes, a music video and lots more besides.



HCC VERDICT

The Princess and the Frog → Walt Disney Home Ent → Region B BD → £26 Approx

We say: A triumphant return to 2D animation celebrated with an equally majestic Blu-ray set

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Spy Next Door

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Jackie Chan's Hollywood career reaches its nadir in this awful kids' flick that will surely struggle to entertain even the most undemanding child. The plot has Chan playing a retired CIA agent, who faces his toughest challenge ever when he's left to look after his neighbour's three young children. Cue endless mugging to camera, obvious wirework stunts and some very mild peril as an old foe returns to take revenge. It's utter garbage, and the Blu-ray with a VC-1 1.78:1 1080p encode is plagued by weak contrast, crushed blacks and a pitiful collection of extras all in SD. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Justice League

Warner Home Video → R2 DVD
£13 Approx



This made-for-DVD animated feature, *Justice League: Crisis on Two Earths*, pits Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and chums against their evil counterparts from another dimension. While the plotting is a touch haphazard at times, the action is sensational and the anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer shows it off extremely well. The DD5.1 audio is lively and ensures that the all-star voice cast (with James Woods as the nefarious Owlman) comes through loud and clear. Extras on the double-disc set include a 26min featurette, plus two episodes of the *Justice League* cartoon . ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

St Trinian's 2

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD £25 Approx



The St Trinian's girls find themselves in a race against time to prevent a woman-hating tycoon (David Tennant) from running off with a load of treasure. While it's slightly better than its awful predecessor, we get the feeling this entire franchise revival is aimed squarely at sad, ageing blokes, who get their thrills watching leggy, 20-somethings dressed as school girls. There's no faulting the bright and colourful AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode, though, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix works hard to balance the ever-present pop music soundtrack and screechy female vocals. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Donnie Darko: Ultimate 2-Disc Set

Metrodome → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



A real low-budget production that used a variety of diffusion filters to give it an '80s vibe, Donnie Darko has always looked pretty rough, and this Blu-ray's AVC 2.35:1 1080p encodes do nothing to change that, looking soft and riddled with specks. So, while it isn't a massive step forward from the DVD, the BD is about as good as the film will ever look. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio tracks see a bigger improvement, with the increased fidelity and detailing adding plenty to the dynamic mix. This set offers both the original and Director's Cuts. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

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Citizen Kane: don't smoke in bed, unless you've got a damn good sprinkler system

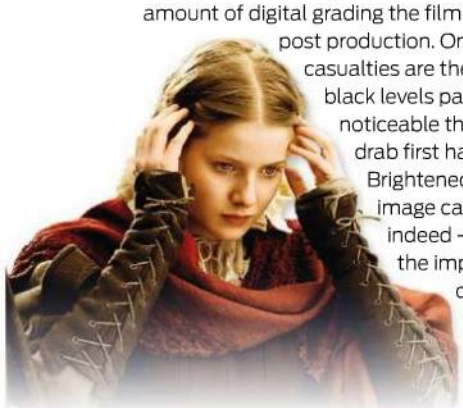


Butcher or Mr Nice Guy?

The fire and brimstone icon rediscovers his violent streak. Hurrah!

Solomon Kane is the latest of *Conan*-creator Robert E Howard's pulp heroes to make the jump to the big screen, and the good news is that the sword-swinging puritan's backstory makes for a cracking swords 'n' sorcery romp. James Purefoy is on excellent form as the morose protagonist, torn between renouncing his old, violent ways and fighting the forces of evil when a family he meets are butchered. While purists will undoubtedly bemoan the new storyline, writer/director Michael J Bassett does a fantastic job of keeping the spirit of Howard's writing alive with his bloody, period riot.

Mark Craven: The image quality appears to improve over the course of the film. This isn't due to any real technical issues with the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode itself, but instead reflects the amount of digital grading the film went through in post production. One of the biggest casualties are the washed-out black levels particularly noticeable throughout the drab first half of the film. Brightened up a little, the image can look very good indeed – just check out the impressive detailing and rock-solid deep blacks on the Fire Demon in Chapter 11.



Steve May: The bombastic bravado of *Solomon Kane*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack effectively adds about $10m to its perceived budget. Everything that can be either buckled or swashed is thrown into the mix and the result is a thrilling fun-ride of explosive audio. Subtlety is appropriately thrown to the wolves. Instead you're placed centre-stage, usually among scenes of carnage, with audio panned front, back and sideways. If you're looking for a demo disc to show off your system, this is it.

Klaus Badelt's score is epic (his long-time collaboration with Hans Zimmer really shows), while sound mixer Tomas Belodhradsky (*Wanted*, *Babylon AD* and the *Hostel* movies) knocks this one out of the park.

Anton van Beek: *Solomon Kane* slices its way onto Blu-ray with a very complementary set of bonus features. There's a pair of commentaries: a solo track by writer/director Michael J Bassett and the other pairing him with leading man, James Purefoy, These provide plenty of background information, the occasional flub (such as Bassett pointing how the BD encode allows you to make out a digital marker left on a blade) and some good banter (Purefoy sarcastically claiming 'It's a Transformer!' when the CG Fire Demon appears). Also included on the disc is a BonusView Storyboard comparison mode, video intro, *Making of* featurette, four interviews, deleted Cave Fight sequence, an art gallery, a VFX deconstruction, a montage of behind-the-scenes footage and the trailer. And it's all presented in native 1080p.





HCC VERDICT

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: An action romp with interesting extras and top-notch audio-visual performance

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Angels and lemons

Stuck in the desert with an exterminating angel? Oh dear



Legion this apocalyptic action-horror on a fairly meagre budget, is a curious flick mixing elements from *The Bible* with *The Terminator*. It's about a gun-toting angel, turned rogue and taking on the rest of the Heavenly horde, when God decides he's finally had it up to here with humanity. It's pretty dopey and heavy-handed stuff that looks good, despite a handful of seriously awful CG effects, but is saddled with a surprisingly dull script that even its well-known cast (including Charles S Dutton, Dennis Quaid and Paul Bettany) can't invigorate.

Mark Craven: *Legion* has two distinct visual styles: sunburnt exteriors and dark, grimy interiors. If you happen to be a fan of the film (and somebody somewhere will probably enjoy it), the good news is that this Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 encode does an excellent job at replicating them both. Detailing is flawless (facial close-ups are particularly impressive, given some of the grizzled faces amongst the cast), colours are spot-on and the expanses of black manage to be impressively deep without obscuring vital shadow detail.

Steve May: There's nothing subtle about *Legion*'s DTS HD 5.1 Master Audio soundtrack. It mashes up horror themes with action thwumps and bumps, in a spirited attempt to generate its own (low rent) sonic apocalypse. The full fury of the LFE is unleashed early and is left to raise hell thereafter. Who would have thought a swarm of flies could go that deep? John Frizzell's score is suitably frantic; the dynamics are unapologetically huge and there's plenty of panned action, from clattering heavy weaponry, to electric maces and swirling, razor-sharp feathers. The end result is a bit like getting drunk in a theme park.

Anton van Beek: For an in-depth look at the making of the film, you should first check out *Bringing Angels to Earth* – a surprisingly involving picture-in-picture track featuring input from writer/director Scott Stewart plus various other members of the cast and crew, interspersed with storyboards and other bits of behind-the-scenes video. After this, the remaining extras all feel a little generic and superfluous.

There's a 24min *Making of...* featurette, four shorter featurettes about the characters, set design, digital effects and the making of one specific sequence all in hi-def.





Desert diners: who ordered the flaming crepes?

HCC VERDICT

Legion → Sony Pictures → All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: Even the divine hi-def imagery can't offer this dull, religious horror any salvation

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Bubba Ho-Tep

Anchor Bay → Region B BD
£20 Approx



When Don Coscarelli and Bruce Campbell join forces for a film about an ageing Elvis and a black JFK, fighting a soul-sucking mummy in a nursing home, you know you're in for a treat. And this is a real low-budget, horror-comedy gem. Picture-wise, the Blu-ray is not the giant step up from DVD we'd expected; it's an excessively grainy AVC 1.78:1 encode taken from a print that could do with some TLC, judging by the abundant print debris. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM 2.0 mixes are both far more impressive in terms of an upgrade, with improved range and depth evident in both. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Deep Blue Sea

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£18 Approx



Revisiting this killer shark horror on BD, a decade after its cinema release, is a pretty sobering experience. The premise itself is as enjoyably daft as ever (a shark so smart it can turn on an oven!), but the improved resolution and detail inherent in the VC-1 2.40:1 encode highlights just how quickly CG effects date; people and sharks alike resemble the blank mannequins from an old PC tech demo. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is every bit as aggressive as the film's trio of genetically-modified mako sharks. Extras are taken from the DVD and include a director's commentary. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Chimera

Revelation Films → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



Stephen Gallagher's horrific mini-series about a man-ape hybrid on the loose in Cumbria provided some sleepless nights for a couple of *HCC* staffers when it was originally transmitted on ITV back in 1991. The series has never been repeated, and only surfaced on VHS back in the day in an edited two-hour movie form. This two-disc DVD finally unleashes the story in its original uncut, four-episode form, and it still holds up well (despite a cringe-worthy early appearance by Paul O'Grady). The 1.33:1 imagery and two-channel audio are perfectly adequate as are the extras. ***MC***

1 2 3 4 5

Predator

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£23 Approx



Predator: The Ultimate Hunter Edition is a highly controversial release. It has always been an unattractive film that suffered from complex production issues, resulting in inconsistent grain and contrast levels, which this AVC 1.85:1 1080p remaster attempts to address. And while it certainly improves on the colour presentation, the problems come from some very aggressive DNR that makes all and sundry look as if they're carved in wax. Watched on anything above 42ins, the problems are all too obvious. The disc is packed with all of the old DVD extras, plus two new features. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

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Collateral

Paramount → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Michael Mann's excellent thriller is enthralling in hi-def. As per his other films, around 85 per cent was shot digitally, and the source material was always challenging on the DVD release. The Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is far more accurate to the source, so that while the inherent noise and subdued hues in the digital footage may not overwhelm videophiles, they are how the film should look. The Blu-ray's visuals are packed with all of the fine detailing you'd expect. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio has an exceptional clarity that excels with ambient sound. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Picnic at Hanging Rock

Second Sight → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Peter Weir's film about the disappearance of three students and a teacher during a visit to Hanging Rock in 1900, has already benefited from a cracking three-disc DVD, but this single-disc BD raises the stakes again. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode of the shorter Director's Cut is a masterclass in presenting a film of this vintage in HD, with fine grain offset by a wealth of detail and exquisite colour. The audio (in LPCM stereo, DD5.1 and DTS-HD MA 5.1) is equally strong, adding enormously to the film's atmosphere. Unmissable. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 **5**

Chloe

Optimum → Region B BD
£23 Approx



An untrusting wife hires a sexy young woman to tempt her husband. The generic plot could describe any number of erotic thrillers, but in the hands of director Atom Egoyan, and with a top-drawer cast that includes Julianne Moore, Amanda Seyfried and Liam Neeson, it's transformed into a mesmerising study of love and obsession. The AVC 1.85:1 encode does a marvellous job of capturing Egoyan's cold, regimented visual style, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is suitably subdued. An impressive selection of extras includes an 86min documentary about the director and his films. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Boogie Nights

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£18 Approx



Paul Thomas Anderson's look at the adult film business, during the industry's transition from film to videotape in the late '70s/early '80s, remains an entertaining and bravura piece of cinema. But it was never given a satisfactory DVD release in the UK. Thankfully, this Blu-ray sets things right with a VC-1 2.40:1 encode and Dolby TrueHD 5.1 soundtrack that mark a serious upgrade from the old R1DVD imports. Plus, most of the extras from that US multi-disc release are here, such as the two commentaries, 10 deleted scenes and footage of John C Reilly's on-set improvisation. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Biker heroine rides in for revenge

The first part of Larsson's Millennium Trilogy is a faithful adaptation and looks chilling

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is an impressively unflinching, Scandinavian adaptation of part one of Stieg Larsson's best-selling thriller trilogy, and it easily lives up to the hype. Taken at face value, it's a typical thriller, which has an investigative journalist digging into an unsolved murder, with a limited number of suspects on an isolated island. But there's a more serious seam running through it that's perhaps best explained by the book's original Swedish title: *Men Who Hate Women*. The central character of Lisbeth Salander, the titular emotionally-repressed, punk-styled, computer hacker (played brilliantly by Noomi Rapace), is undoubtedly the most fascinating and complex sociopath to appear on screen since Hannibal Lecter first enjoyed some fava beans and a nice Chianti. Roll on the next two films in the trilogy...

Mark Craven: *The Girl...* is the latest of those Blu-ray releases that do a fine job of replicating the intended look of the movie, but is unlikely to wow those looking for the ultimate hi-def experience. Presented in its original 2.40:1 aspect ratio, the MPEG4 AVC 1080p imagery handles the film's distinctive crushed blacks and flat colours rather well. Where some people might have a problem though is the heavy grain evident throughout, which while film-like, is thick enough to obscure some fine detailing.

Steve May: There are a variety of sonic options on this platter, but none are lossless: the original Swedish 5.1 Dolby Digital mix with subtitles rubs shoulders with Swedish stereo, and there's an English language dubbed track in either 5.1 DD or stereo, too. The latter is best avoided; but note that the subtitles themselves run within the picture area of the letterboxed image.

This lossy presentation is a shame, as the score by Danish veteran, Jacob Groth, is as moreish as a plate of gravlax. However, as this is quite a talky thriller, you may feel the loss isn't too significant. The surround track is used primarily as a smorgasbord for enveloping music, atmospherics and the occasional panned effects. Not a classic mix, but an interesting one nonetheless.

Anton van Beek: The disc's biggest let down is the lacklustre collection of extras bundled on offer. The only material relating to the making of the film is a pair of 12min interviews with Noomi Rapace and producer Søren Staermose. Beyond this there's a 5min 1080p clip from the next film in the series (*The Girl Who Played with Fire*), a trailer for the sequel (the only extra in HD), the UK trailer for *...Dragon Tattoo*, a photo gallery, a Vanger family tree and a collection of facts about the books the films were based on.



HCC VERDICT

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: → Momentum Pictures → Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Let down by paltry extras and lack of lossless audio

Picture: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Sound: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Extras: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 **5**

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5



Illustrated woman: goes wild when she gets the needle

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Bigscreen decision

I've been saving up to buy the new 65in Panasonic 3D plasma coming out this Summer. It's pretty expensive, at around £4,500, but as I am a big fan of the Pioneer Kuros I'm not sure anything else would live up to my expectations. And, as they say, 'You get what you pay for'.

I then saw that Samsung has released a 63in 3D plasma for nearly half the price at around £2,500 (PS63C7000), and if you shop around you can sweeten the deal even further and get this down to £2,250 – including a free Samsung 3D Blu-ray player with two pairs of active shutter glasses and a copy of *Monsters vs. Aliens* chucked in for good measure. This deal just seems too good to be true and it's prompted a few questions.

1: Do you think that I'm likely to be disappointed with the 2D picture quality of the Samsung when compared with the Pioneer PDP-LX5090?

2: Is the 3D crosstalk likely to be less of an issue with this plasma screen than with LCD screens due to superior plasma screen response time?

3: As I already have a 50in Pioneer Kuro, should I wait until next year when Panasonic fully integrate the now-licensed Kuro technology into their 2011 screens and 3D has had a chance to go through it's infancy and address any first year issues?

The main reason for my upgrade is that I would like a larger screen with as close to Kuro picture quality as possible, but with the future-proofing of 3D. What would you do?
Nathan, via email

To answer your first question, yes, you may be disappointed with the 2D picture quality of the Samsung plasma compared to your Kuro. Those Pioneer screens still rank as the best we've seen for watching HD on a bigscreen, although they are rivalled by Panasonic's latest plasma panels. However, don't forget the new breed of TVs offer features – net access, Freeview HD tuner, media streaming, etc – that the Pioneer doesn't.

You're definitely right, though, to be looking at a plasma TV for 3D viewing if you're worried about crosstalk. Our experience so far is that the LCD-based displays suffer from this more than PDPs. That's not to say the LCD-based 3DTVs aren't worth investigating! As for waiting until next year, that's entirely down to you. It's always tempting to hold back and see what new kit comes along – but can you bear to wait?



Kuro: TV classic

Gaming in my cinema

This is directed to The Beek and his question about printing reviews of video games in *HCC*. I am totally for this proposal.

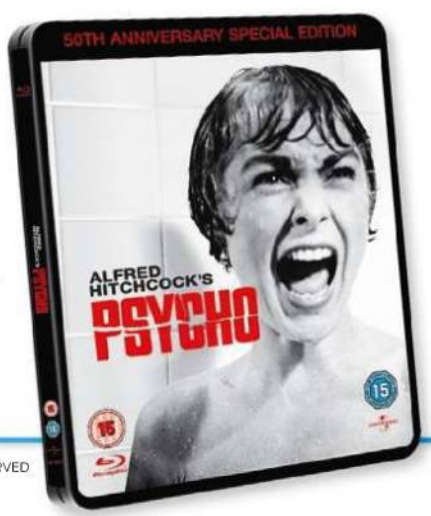
Star Letter

Are my speakers 3D-ready?

As a regular reader of *HCC*, I have found it invaluable in helping me to understand the technologies in existence today, so that I can make an informed decision before purchasing a new home cinema system. So after months of research, I had settled for an LG 47in LED screen, Onkyo THX Ultra2 receiver and a set of Teufel THX Ultra2 speakers. However, the onset of 3D technologies has made me wary of any purchases as I am not sure how they will be affected. What's for sure is that I will now wait for a 3D screen, but will the specifications of AV receivers and speakers need to change, too, or am I now delaying unnecessarily?
Jonny Wilkinson, Cambridgeshire

First things first: there's no such thing as supporting 3D where speakers are concerned, so you can still get the Teufel set without worry.

Choosing an AVR is a different matter, as only those with HDMI v1.4 connections will pass through 3D control codes to your TV. An HDMI v1.3 receiver will pass 3D video, but your 3DTV at the other end might not function as it should. Hoever, you don't mention the model name of the Onkyo you had decided on. Unless it's either the recently announced TX-NR3008 or TX-NR5008 (see page 7), it won't offer both THX Ultra2 and HDMI v1.4 connectivity.



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I mainly use my home cinema for movies and TV with the odd game thrown in when I can find a good one. I have an Arcam AVR 600 with Dali Ikon 5.1 speakers fed by an Oppo multiregion modded Blu-ray and a PS3 , so I suppose you would describe it as upper mid-range equipment.

I have a solution to finding the space for the games reviews. I am personally not interested in custom-fit £100,000-plus setups, except perhaps to see how the other half lives. Now that home cinema is becoming more common, I suggest that you concentrate on the more normal setups and use the space released. I am 63 so do not want the magazine turning into a teenage fanboy games review type of publication, but one for the more intelligent and mature reader. I know this suggestion will upset the journos on your staff who get to tour the world looking at expensive installs, but that is what I would like from the magazine.
Barry Wilkinson, via email

Thanks for your comments, Barry – we'll take them on board. As for touring the world looking at expensive installs, we're afraid it's more Basingstoke than Bali.

While I wait...

Do you have any idea when the PlayStation 3 will be able to play 3D Blu-rays?
Ali, via email

Soon, we hope. Sony has said its firmware update will be available in September, but we'll only believe it when we see it!

Can I save my TV?

I have what I believe was one of the first DLP rear projection TVs to be sold in the UK. It's an RE44SZ21 made by LG, and – with one replacement lamp – has served well all these years. Now it's gone bad! The picture has taken on a greenish hue and shifted to the left, leaving a black margin on the right of the screen. Can it be mended? Is it worth mending?
Mike Emerson, via e-mail

This TV set is nearly seven years old, we believe, and you've done very well to have got through with only one replacement lamp. The trouble you describe results from corruption of the data held in the EEPROM memory chip. Whether it's worth repair depends on how satisfied you are with this relatively low-specified screen, and what quotes/estimates you can get for the job. If it was our choice, we'd send it to a museum and get a shiny new HD flatscreen instead.

Blu-ray is a joke!

I've held back buying Blu-ray as to me it seems to be one big con. Even *HCC* were praising DVD players that upscaled films to a quality close to Blu-ray, so why pay £15 for a Blu-ray film when you can get the same film on DVD for less than a fiver? Plus, there's no loading time.

I prefer the features on my 10-year-old DVD player as opposed to the cheaply-made equivalent Blu-ray models. The picture is an improvement, but not enough to make me replace my entire DVD collection. I struggle to see the difference with some films on the two machines.

Also, when Blu-ray started to come we heard 'the capacity of them means you could fit an entire TV series on one disc!'

Name one company who is going to stick an entire series on one disc when they can make a ton more by releasing a multi-disc boxset.

I just find the whole Blu-ray format a bit of a joke at present.
Anonymous, via the website

Getting an entire TV season on one Blu-ray disc just isn't possible at the moment – unless it's encoded in standard-def, which would confuse punters a bit, we think!

As for Blu-rays costing more than DVDs – it's because they're so much better in AV quality and extra features. You wouldn't expect a new car with better features to cost less than your old banger would you?

Note, though, that if you invest in Panasonic or Samsung's 3D Blu-ray players, you can send the 3D picture direct to your TV via HDMI, and route audio to an HDMI v.1.3 receiver via a second HDMI output (in the Panasonic's case) or via phono multichannel outputs (the Samsung method). So your chosen AVR may still be fine – it depends what Blu-ray deck you want to hook up.

Winner: Star Letter writer Jonny Wilkinson wins a copy of *Psycho: 50th Anniversary Special Edition* on Blu-ray, courtesy of Universal Pictures UK. It's available to buy from August 2, priced at £20 approx.

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SELECT

➜ Buying Guide **BEST EVER LCD TV** The top performing LCD screens in the UK **HI-DEF PLAYERS** Looking for a Blu-ray deck? We help you choose **PLASMA POWER** Your guide to the ultimate bigscreen TV **ROCKIN' RECEIVERS** The best specs and latest codecs **SUPREME SPEAKERS** Need a 5.1 package? We name the best! **PLUS** subwoofers, projectors, PVRs & more...

TOP BUYER'S GUIDE
All killer no filler



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 **5**
Essential purchase	1 2 3 **4** 5
Does the job	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Don't touch it	**1** 2 3 4 5

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-40EX503
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

LCD with built-in Freeview HD tuner and Bravia Internet Video

Highs: Free HD channels on tap; value for money; 'net interactivity
Lows: CCFL backlight

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SONY
46in → KDL-40NX803
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Edge-lit LED TV with Monolith design and leaning stand

Highs: Smart design; superb remote; deep blacks and crisp colours
Lows: Soft focus GUI

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SAMSUNG
40in → UE-40C7000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Debut 3DTV stands out in other areas, too

Highs: Next-gen tech; Freeview HD tuner; app store
Lows: Fiddly control system; 3D effect needs a bigger display

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Via HDMI only
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

LG's LED-lit 'Seamless' LCD offers excellent value for money

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibrated controls
Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design isn't all that

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
46in → LC-46LE821E
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Quad Pixel edge-lit LED TV with innovative in-built Flash PVR

Highs: Amazing levels of fine detail; great colour fidelity; useful Time Shift function
Lows: No video streaming

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



JVC
32in → LT-32WX50
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Installer-friendly 32in monitor with a wide colour gamut

Highs: Jaw-dropping ultra-slim design; terrific colour response and still image playback
Lows: Backlight inconsistencies

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 2
No. of Scart inputs: 0
No. of component inputs: Via D-Sub adaptor
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: No

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE40B650
£700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Look for good deals on this 2009-issue 40in LCD

Highs: Superb features; excellent all-round pics; design
Lows: Audio performance is pretty pathetic

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
47in → 47LE8900
£2,100 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Full LED-backlit LCD with LG's NetCast feature and THX cred

Highs: Smart fascia and interface; good colours and contrast; great calibration tools
Lows: Limited web content

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes , Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5



Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. We expect to see a 3D version launched later this year.

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

In association with dts Digital Entertainment

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and DVB-S2 tuner

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

THX-certified, ultrathin PDP with wireless transmission

Highs: Stunning HD and SD pictures; gorgeous design; good features set
Lows: Premium price point

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50G20
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Freeview HD and Freesat HD plasma is the FTA king

Highs: Performance; price; Freesat/Freeview HD tuners;
Lows: USB recording mode comes with strings attached

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Freesat HD NeoPDP at an enticing price

Highs: Wide viewing angle; excellent HD pics
Lows: Lacks brightness; three HDMIs only

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications
HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50VT20
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



The arrival of Panasonic's first 3DTV was always going to get the AV juices running, and this 50in plasma doesn't disappoint – 3D Blu-ray material comes over sharp and smooth with no visible crosstalk, while Sky's half-resolution 3D preview channel is revelatory, with sports coverage in particular showing excellent depth and detail. Other highlights of this surprisingly affordable 3D set include the two pairs of supplied eyewear, class-leading 2D hi-def picture performance, and savvy networking skills.

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p)
Native resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.4)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling
Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: w
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-C6900
£350 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Early adopters will love this 3D Blu-ray player

Highs: 3D compatibility; video quality; USB file support
Lows: v1.4 HDMI output means hookup to older AVRs will be via 7.1 outputs

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs
Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD85
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

New top-of-the line deck – until the 3D player arrives...

Highs: Overall picture and sound performance; 'Tube' sound emulator for CDs
Lows: Somewhat sluggish menus; Wi-Fi via dongle only

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi via dongle; SD card slot; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BDT300
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D BD deck to work in tandem with the brand's 3D plasmas

Highs: Solid AV performance; 3D material is sharp, smooth and involving; twin HDMI outputs
Lows: Wi-Fi is by dongle only

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; optional Wi-Fi dongle; USB; SD slot

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S370 → £150 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

HOME CINEMA CHOICE NEW ENTRY



The first of Sony's 2010 Blu-ray players to come through the *HCC* Tech Labs has left us dying to see the higher-end models. This entry-level £150 machine is an absolute AV bargain, blowing its sub £200 rivals out of the water thanks to its superb XMB control interface, BBC iPlayer and LoveFilm online access, Super Audio CD playback and, of course, quality HD video and audio performance. More proof that the Big S's Blu-ray focus is more than just the PS3.

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS HD-MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; 2 x USB; Bravia Internet Video BBC iPlayer, LoveFilm, YouTube, etc

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound
Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image
Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO
Blu-ray → Azur 650BD
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First deck from UK brand is a solid performer – and multiregion DVD, too

Highs: Bulletproof build; excellent AV performance
Lows: No 'net features

→ Specifications
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.cambridgeaudio.com

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess
Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications
HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback
Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications
HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDM: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Large HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent
Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sagem.com/uk



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx

1 2 **3** 4 5

Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures
Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications
HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



GRUNDIG
Freesat PVR → GUFSDTR500HD
£280 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Dual-tuner Freesat+ PVR with capacious 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; cool-running; efficient upscaling of non-HD channels
Lows: USB port is disabled

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.topfield.co.uk

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability
Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications
HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX773
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

DVD/HDD recorder that misses out on Freeview HD

Highs: Solid AV performance; heaps of features and recording flexibility
Lows: No infra-red control over STB; single Freeview tuner only

→ Specifications
HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: No – USB/SD via USB instead
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured
Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications
HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility. Freeview HD iterations have joined the stable this Summer.

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

AV Receivers

Best on test...



NAD
Amp/Processor
M25/M15HD
£6,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Classy heavyweight combo

Highs: Innovative modular design; excellent performance
Lows: No XLR jacks

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 160W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
nadelectronics.com



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V2065
£850 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

New-look Yamaha receiver is a great sub-£1K all-rounder

Highs: Superb networking prowess; wonderful natural sound that suits all material
Lows: GUI takes some getting used to

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.yamaha.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR5007
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

9.2-channel HD receiver with exhaustive features and power

Highs: First-class home cinema performance; processing allows 9-channel height/width audio
Lows: No proprietary anti-jitter tech, Wi-Fi or secondary remote

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ONKYO
Amp/Processor
PR-SC5500/PA-MC5500
£3,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Onkyo's separates system delivers on all AV fronts

Highs: Massive power reserves; Smooth AV performance
Lows: Sizable and weighty

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: (Yes FM/AM/net)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3;
Serial port control: Yes;
THX certification: Ultra2;
Component input: 3;
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



SONY
AVR → STR-DH800
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Slick, flexible bargain model with provision for wireless multiroom audio

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use
Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 85W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: No
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No, unless you use S-Air wireless speakers
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

DENON
AVR → AVR-4810
£2,800 Approx



1 2 3 4 **5**

Denon's AVR-4810 is the current king of the new breed of receivers that make all sorts of speaker configurations possible. Thanks to Audyssey DSX and Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing, it's capable of driving an 11.3-channel system (with the aid of an extra stereo amp), and it'll have you re-arranging your speakers in no time. Beyond this mastery of new formats, the AVR-4810 delivers a rich, powerful sound and a full suite of features from Net radio and integrated Wi-Fi to a wide chioce of inputs and four-zone multiroom. Brilliant.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.denon.co.uk

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: AM/FM/Net
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use
Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR608
£450 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

3D-capable AVR delivers great value for money

Highs: Appealing price tag; big, fast, dynamic sound; solid video scaling
Lows: No networking or USB functionality; uninspiring build

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 160W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon
Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

In association with dts Digital Entertainment

Projectors

Best on test...



INFOCUS
DLP → ScreenPlay SP8602
£3,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

New-look LCD projector from a much-revered brand

Highs: Excellent picture quality; good range of adjustments; different 'skins'
Lows: Not as flexible to set up as some; slightly noisy runner

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 3
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,500 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.infocus.com



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

A brilliant Full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger
Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Successor the VW80 delivers a truly cinematic picture

Highs: Astonishing contrast and detail levels; plenty of picture tweaks
Lows: MotionFlow tech is best left unused

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk/biz



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5500
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Epson's flagship home cinema projector does LCD proud

Highs: Lots of features; easy and flexible to setup; produces the finest LCD pictures yet
Lows: More expensive than rivals; can lose focus a little

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed) 200,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set
Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



BENQ
DLP → W1000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

A £1K Full HD projector with good colour presets

Highs: Very sharp HD pictures; alluring tactile finish; plenty of fine-tuning options
Lows: Rainbow effect; noticeable fan noise

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 3,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 27dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness
Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan
Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

JVC
D-ILA → HD950
£6,000 Approx



1 2 3 4 **5**

Put simply, JVC's new video-chucker is capable of an awe-inspiring performance. Spin up a Blu-ray and you'll be rewarded with three-dimensional, natural-looking pictures that are packed with detail, shadow subtlety and vibrant colours. Setting up the HD950 is made easy by its fully-motorised optical adjustments, and a THX-certified colour preset for those not wanting to get their hands dirty in its extensive calibration menus. It's an almost silent runner, too. The best PJ we've yet seen at this price point.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.jvc.co.uk

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → SILVER RX6 AV12s
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Dynamic, engaging sound with pin-sharp detail; taut, powerful bass; excellent build
Lows: Base plinths seem to belong to another design

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 125, 1 x 80W Rears: Dipolar
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Gloss;
Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 160W, Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



ACOUSTIC ENERGY
5.1 → AEGIS Neo V2
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Superior £1K system is excellent value for money

Highs: Classy build; dynamic, detailed and exciting audio performance; quality subwoofer
Lows: Sub controls may be daunting for beginners

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.acoustic-energy.co.uk



BOWERS & WILKINS
5.1 → CM Series
£4,250 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Top quality 5.1 array in a classical wood finish

Highs: True sweet highs from hi-tech tweeters; brilliant 10in woofer; solid construction
Lows: Square-edge design not exactly high-end

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 200W, 2 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



KLIPSCH
5.1 → Icon system
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Sleek-looking US-made system with horn technology

Highs: High-quality audio; excellent value for money; clever, simple-to-use subwoofer
Lows: Not suited to largescale home cinema rooms

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 125W, 2 x 75W, 1 x 100
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.klipsch.co.uk

Also Recommended...



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 8 THX Ultra2
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

5.1 system with THX Ultra2 certification

Highs: Full-fat THX performance at a low-price; huge, potent subwoofer
Lows: Mail-order only means there's no chance to try before you buy

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 120W, 2 x 80W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 600W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.teufel.eu



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



FOCAL JMLAB
5.1 → Dome
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Bold, full and detailed sound quality for music and home cinema; gorgeous design
Lows: Large cabinets offer more presence; bit pricey

→ Specifications
Power handling: 5 x 100W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Aluminium; red, black, white; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.focal-uk.com

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

Scan & PDF: worldmags & avaxhome

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features
Lows: High-end rivals have a *bit* more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



PARADIGM
SW → Signature Sub 2
£7,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference grade sub for serious installs only

Highs: Astonishing power, control and speed; build quality is first-rate
Lows: Can you afford one?

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 7Hz-150Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 4,500W
Driver: 6 x 10in
Weight: 105.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.paradigm.com



TANNOY
SW → TS1201
£600 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

12in sub with simultaneous LFE and speaker level inputs

Highs: Smart looks; easy of use; real weight and presence
Lows: Remote control will cost you extra

→ Specifications
Frequency response: Down to 21Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 16.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.tannoy.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.velodyne.com

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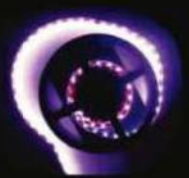
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